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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Two New Rights Do Not Make a Wrong

by Charles R. Kesler

There are many reasons to sympathize with young conservatives who have grown up in modern, or worse, in postmodern, America. Surrounded by on-demand and even no-demand pornography, the Muzak of their era, and schooled on the supercilious condemnation of virtue, white males, and American history in particular, they are barely acquainted with the America that decades ago enjoyed a much healthier moral and intellectual culture.

No wonder, then, that the leading characteristic of the so-called New Right is its simultaneous alienation both from woke liberalism and from what used to be called "movement conservatism." The latter it disdains as Conservatism, Inc., the "beautiful losers" (Sam Francis's haunting phrase) who didn't try to win because they didn't even want to win. Why struggle to dethrone cultural liberalism when it pays so well to faux-fight it forever?

All strains of the New Right—MAGA enthusiasts, National Conservatives, post-liberals, neo-integralists, Bronze Age-revivalists, and many others—seem to agree that the old conservative movement, Bill Buckley, Barry Goldwater, and Reagan's movement, whatever its initial successes (about which the critics disagree), had failed by the end of the 1980s to attain its own highest goal, to replace liberalism as the dominant public philosophy. That would not be news to Reagan, who admitted as much in his farewell address.

Most of the New Rightists blame movement conservatism's failure on its bad or insufficient theory, which Frank Meyer at *National Review* had christened fusionism—the happy melding of traditionalism and libertarianism. The New Right argues that this conservative combo valued libertarianism too highly, giving economic conservatism the whip hand over social conservatism, unhappily condemning the Right to decades of defeats against social or cultural liberalism on questions ranging from obscenity to immigration to affirmative action. So long as taxes remained low and the Fortune 500 prospered, who cared about the social issues?

There is some truth in this account. It's true, for example, that the traditionalist-libertarian fusionism of old is no longer what we in California would call an active fault line. It's not where the beating heart of conservatism is anymore. But I'm not sure it was there in the 1960s either, despite all the books and conferences devoted to the subject.

Fusionism was always a better description of the conservative intellectual movement than of the conservative political movement. Most right-wingers back then, after all, were both social *and* economic conservatives, and something more—what John Fonte calls patriotic conservatives. They were anti-tax and pro-school prayer, and anti-Communist and pro-America all at the same time. And that *tertium quid* predated neoconservatism, which nevertheless liked to claim credit for it.

The political drama of Buckley-Reagan conservatism lay not in the formulas of fusionism, handy as they were, but in the rollicking political battles that the nascent conservative movement fought—and by which it defined itself—against the liberal "establishment." To name some examples: the battle over McCarthyism and internal security and corruption, which meant

over the evil of Communism and the goodness of America—not so far, really, from today's debate over wokeness. Then the long struggle over the civil rights revolution, beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act in 1964-65, then on to busing for racial balance, affirmative action, and diversity. Again, complicated and inflammatory questions that went to the very meaning of America. And who remembers that Phyllis Schlafly stopped the "inevitable" ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in its tracks?

These kinds of battles are far from the apolitical or anti-political libertarianism that the New Right holds to be the essence of the older conservatism. In fact, they suggest a certain continuity between the conservative situation then and now, despite the vast differences between, say, Bill Buckley and Donald Trump.

As Buckley put it in 1959, criticizing President Eisenhower for his excessive "modulation": when "encompassed by the blandness of Modern Republicanism [Ike's slogan], the stimulation of intellectual and political resistance to the continued liberal offensive is all but impossible." Hence the need to "tell it straight," as in his campaign for New York City mayor in 1965, when he called for a one-year residency requirement for city welfare benefits and for "deporting" chronic welfare cases to outside the city limits. As he phrased it: "It is as obvious to me as it is to you that no American should be permitted to starve to death. But I do not believe that people should be encouraged to schedule their own starvation to begin immediately upon arriving in New York City."

The New Right, meet "the new conservatives" of the 1950s and beyond…. You may have something in common besides your name. You may even have something to cheer.

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Separation of Race and State

I can unabashedly say that I am a huge fan of Richard Epstein, and it's an honor to have him review my book *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America* for *CRB* ("Dividing by Race," Fall 2022).

If I am parsing the review correctly, Professor Epstein and I agree on the basic thesis of my book: the government-mandated racial classifications (Asian, Black, Native American, White, Hispanic) that are ubiquitous in American life are arbitrary and clumsy. It's ultimately impossible to defend how they are commonly used—in everything from choosing subjects and reporting data in biomedical and sociological research to minority business enterprise and higher education preferences. *Classified* discusses the origins, definitions, application, and enforcement of these classifications in great detail to support this conclusion, and Epstein graciously praises my tenacity in uncovering and presenting these findings.

Where we disagree is that Epstein thinks my book should have had a "Part 2," in which I start with the "proposal that an antidiscrimination norm should govern private parties only when they are analogous to common carriers and public utilities, whose monopoly position puts them under the nondiscrimination rules." That is both a radical and intriguing idea, one that he brilliantly defended in his 1992 book, *Forbidden Grounds*. There is virtually no public support for such a proposal at this time, however, and I chose (wisely, I think) to assume the legal framework of antidiscrimination and affirmative action will likely remain similar to that status

quo for the foreseeable future.

Epstein also suggests that "at no point does Bernstein address how private institutions might help tackle the challenges of racial and ethnic classifications." I was perhaps unclear on this point, but when I suggest in the book that government classifications should be abolished in favor of more finely tuned classifications, almost always on a non-racial basis, I intended to propose that the matter be left largely to the private sector.

That said, two problems present themselves. The first is that so long as the government collects racial data in the census and elsewhere, the path of least resistance for everyone else is to rely on that data. The second problem is more subtle: even when the government does not dictate what classifications to use, private parties almost always blindly follow the government classifications. Until recently, I was under the misimpression that universities all rely on the standard racial classifications for affirmative action because they are required to report the relevant statistics to the government. That turns out to be incorrect; universities use the government-created classifications because they have, thanks to the government, come to see them as natural, and because relying on the government's classifications provides something of a safe harbor from litigation.

It will take more than merely having the government refrain from dictating classifications to undo the damage that has been done. But a good start, as the book argues, is the separation of race and state.

David E. Bernstein
Antonin Scalia Law School
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Richard A. Epstein replies:

As David Bernstein notes, the differences, such as they are, between us go to matters of exposition and tactics. They are not fundamental in any sense of the word.

I am glad he agrees that he should have made the role of private intervention more explicit. He then takes an (uncharacteristically) cautious stance by recognizing that the *status quo ante* on discrimination and affirmative action is not likely to change soon, which I fear is correct. But as I argue in *Forbidden Grounds*, major intellectual progress can be made only if scholars are prepared to take on the dominant paradigm, as I sought to do.

In a sense, his perceptive observations at the end of the letter, which note how government standards become ubiquitous by coercion and example, highlight the risk. Government standards become the focal point for all private behavior, which only entrenches the *status quo ante*. The sad consequence is that incremental steps are doomed to fail, even if they point in the right direction. Which is why I favor a frontal assault in order to make out the strongest intellectual case for dismantling that status quo, which Bernstein wants to do in his heroic efforts to separate race and state.

Fair and Free Elections

In response to Charles R. Kesler's "The Red Wave Reconsidered" (Fall 2022), I would suggest that the main reason Florida's Republican slate managed a Red Wave instead of a Pink Fizzle in 2022 had less to do with Florida's Republicans and more to do with reforms undertaken after the 2000 presidential election, when

Florida's ballots were such a mess that the Supreme Court had to intervene. After becoming a laughingstock, with hanging chads and folks with magnifying glasses trying to guess the intent of the voter, Florida was motivated to fix its election process. Since then, the Sunshine State's results are reported on election night, not two weeks later. (You can make of that what you will.)

So, before Mr. Kesler canonizes Governor DeSantis (I like him, too) and the rest of Florida's Republican slate, he should keep in mind that the forces in play in 2022 will still be in play in 2024.

Elizabeth K. Gregory
Virginia Beach, VA

CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS
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THE DISPUTED QUESTION

AGAINST THE NEW REPUBLICAN ISOLATIONISM

by Mark Helprin

I believe that with regard to Michael Anton's essay "Nuclear Autumn" (Fall 2022), it is necessary to offer a counterpoint to its portrayal of, and the lessons it derives from, the Missile Crisis of 1983, in which I was a minor participant but a close observer. Now unjustly obscure, this was the last great struggle of the Cold War. The Soviet aim was not only to achieve and maintain an unmatched nuclear advantage via the deployment of the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles menacing Europe, but, more importantly, to convince the West that having provoked this action

and thus bearing the guilt, it had better not react, as doing so would be yet a greater provocation that might lead to nuclear Armageddon. Fought in the hearts and minds of Western populations, the battle was a political crisis that willfully and for effect was passed off by one side as a military crisis. The conclusion was hardly certain, but as Ronald Reagan might have said: we won, they lost.

Like Gaul, my counterpoint is divided into three parts.

Between the Extremes

First, a modern, conventional war is raging between Russia, a nuclear-armed, inherently unstable semi-superpower, and Ukraine, a much smaller, conventionally armed buffer state informally associated with NATO countries that, absent any treaty obligations other than the defunct Budapest Memorandum, increasingly afford it material and diplomatic support. To what extent is this war capable of spreading to central and western Europe, drawing in NATO, and/or going nuclear?

The answer to this question is complicated by the fact that it is approached on its extremes by advocates aligned with rapidly hardening political positions tangential or even irrelevant to the action as it unfolds. On the one hand are the capitulationists, who see insufficient reason to intervene, refuse to project the consequences of a Russian victory, or are simply terrified of escalation, nuclear or otherwise. These motives are often strengthened by an expressed desire to divert military spending to domestic use, and the libertarian view of a world far safer than the tragedies of either history or the present confirm.

On the other are those who take reckless, self-referential pride in damning the torpedoes. They are insufficiently impressed by—or aware of—Russia's perseverance, paranoia, and history of inva-

sion; its nuclear arsenal; its famously permissive nuclear doctrine; and its unstable, opaque governance by a vulnerable autocrat dependent upon shifting coalitions of warlords, oligarchs, gangsters, and mystic ideologues. As Russia is neither the dull Soviet Union of old nor a modern Western democracy professing humane values, it is capable of rash, unpredictable acts.

Although middle courses are often no more than fruitless compromises dictated by the weaknesses of contending positions and endowed with the disadvantages of each, in this case a walk between the extremes would disallow Russian victory (and all that would follow as Europe and Asia are subject to further assault by emboldened dictatorships) and simultaneously avoid pushing Russia beyond its true red lines to a place of desperation where its accepted doctrine emphatically tells it that it may resort to nuclear weapons.

Russian nuclear strategies are a lot more flexible than ours, but in some respects that are now pertinent they are not all that dissimilar. Both envision, though with different thresholds, the use of tactical nuclear weapons to counter the conventional invasion of national territories. This customary guidance, however, is made newly volatile due to Russia's claim as its own of ground that recently was Ukraine's, and to Russia's large inventory, dwarfing NATO's, of tactical nuclear weapons readily integrated into its conventional echelons.

A central question in "Nuclear Autumn"—whether taking on nuclear risk is justifiable "over…the Donbass?"—neither has been answered in the affirmative nor is applicable to the current situation, as developments thus far have shown. Nor is it a valid impeachment of the West's policy at present. But it may yet be applicable, and as such suggests a course of action no doubt unsatisfactory to both extremes in the debate over Ukraine. It is, however, what I—and

doubtless, for all the influence we have, other singing mice (and also France's President Macron as well as, presumably, unnamed, reticent heads of state)—have had in mind since the beginning.

That is, the West should not share in Ukraine's oft-stated aim (necessary to lay out a negotiating position and stiffen morale) of restoring the whole of its territory. It is likely that, despite their declarations, the leaders of NATO and President Zelensky himself understand this, as they immediately face and are perilously subject to the forces of reality. We don't know if Ukraine will ever be in a position to drive into the Crimea or the solidified Russian cantons in Ukraine's east. Nor do we know who would be in control of Russia at such a time. One thing, however, is clear. If the Russian state is on the verge of collapse, or if Russia is about to be pushed out of the territories it has held since 2014—especially the Crimea—it will seriously consider a tactical nuclear option. Thus, a settlement derived of force alone that cedes the Crimea and a portion of Ukraine's east, tragic as it may be for tragedy-rich Ukraine, seems the only feasible course. So the answer to the question is, fairly obviously (as no doubt intended), no. But the question as it is presented is not applicable to support of Ukraine up to this point and as it now stands.

To answer the potential objection that a settlement would afford Russia a long breath before resuming its conquests, it seems quite clear that unlike the weak response to, and therefore encouragement of, Russia's serial aggressions prior to 2022, the West would have to, and would be likely to, embark upon a program of immensely strengthening both NATO's and Ukraine's military capacities so as to deter another invasion. Although given the ongoing suicide of the West, this is not guaranteed, there was indeed a sea change in Europe when it felt the winds of war close in the east.

What if Ukraine crosses the red lines I have sketched above, or

if, surprisingly and without pretext, Russia turns to nuclear weapons, as cannot be ruled out? Anton echoes the common misconception that this would lead to catastrophic nuclear warfare. It might, which is one reason for nations always to make every effort not to turn to nuclear weapons. But would it? Russia's strategy of "escalate to de-escalate," as risky as it is, is premised upon nuclear use primarily as a signal. That would be, for example, the detonation of a very low-yield weapon on or over a sparsely populated area of Ukraine.

What would be the result of such an outrage, especially given the unavoidable casualties? Not, for sure, even a limited nuclear response, or a punitive, conventional attack upon Russia itself, both of which would open the gates to uncontrollable escalation. Rather, NATO would put its vastly superior economies, military establishments, and collective population on a war footing to deter further Russian adventurism. Its three nuclear powers would heavily reinforce their deterrent strategic arsenals and set up missile defenses. The civilized world would sanction the Russian economy such as never before, and Russia's friends would, if not desert it, pull away and keep their distance.

Putin knows this, as do most of his generals. But Yevgeny Prigozhin and Ramzan Kadyrov—two bandits of a type that *in extremis* might succeed him—may not, which is why, whereas the West must not be unduly afraid of Russian nuclear use, it must not fail to discipline itself so as not to make it likely. Not to be unduly afraid means to continue to support Ukraine so that it is not pushed back from current lines and may yet advance varyingly beyond them to establish more defensible positions. Not to fail in discipline means to establish war aims in view of and limited by the potential for uncontrollable escalation. Such a dual approach requires the rejection of extremes in favor of the careful calibration of objectives and

support. It would be very dangerous were the ship to list too far to port or too far to starboard.

Play in the Joints

Second, the proxy wars of the Cold War were similar to the Ukraine War now, in that, to take two examples, the U.S. was actively fighting in Vietnam while Russia and China supplied the North with materiel and even advisors, and Russia was fighting in Afghanistan while the U.S. supported the Mujahidin. These notably hot wars did not escalate to direct conflict among their sponsors. And in consideration of what appears to be the central thesis in "Nuclear Autumn," to what extent is the current situation comparable to the 1983 Missile Crisis, and how close then did we come in general to a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, to a Soviet-American conflict, to a nuclear demonstration, or even to either a tactical or strategic nuclear war?

Anton makes use of the era's standard operating procedures, as well as the particular responses with which the West navigated the Missile Crisis, in aid of the implicit argument that the United States and its allies should withdraw or drastically curtail their support of Ukraine. The purported wisdom of such a historical overview dovetails perfectly with the swelling isolationist impulses of the populist, in-your-face but proudly wobbly GOP and, despite the small circulation of the *CRB*, might through the latter's disproportionate influence serve as an ideological template for action in the surreal disaster that is Washington.

To make use of one of Thomas Sowell's favorite expressions, if we are to be serious about evidence, it is wrong on almost every major point. Drawing from the considerable inventory of fallacies, for example, in regard to what is deemed the Reagan Administration's

"PsyOps" and in Anton's essay is prejudicially associated with the Reichstag fire, Lord Haw-Haw, and Tokyo Rose: "Mere days into Reagan's presidency," these "included sneaking American submarines into Soviet waters where they would suddenly surface near a critical military installation, hang around long enough to be seen, and then submerge and bug out."

How many days is not specified, but such a mission would require careful advanced planning and clearance. What is meant by "Soviet waters?" Warships are allowed innocent passage through territorial waters. And were "Soviet waters" the much broader exclusive economic zones? How close to critical military installations? The appearance of submarines in close proximity to shore was neither new nor exclusive to the U.S., as Sweden can confirm even today. In 1958, I myself was present when between Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket a Soviet submarine surfaced like a great, mysterious whale and then returned to the deep. The object of penetration missions that did trespass into Soviet military areas was not provocation but intelligence gathering while avoiding detection, which would have compromised further missions and might have been fatal.

"Somewhat more unnerving to the Kremlin was the practice of flying highly visible B-52s [prior to stealth aircraft, all strategic bombers were highly visible, the B-52 only marginally more so] on what looked like bombing runs." Long common practice, these were training missions partly to gauge response, and they were routine to both powers rather than a sudden provocation attributable to the Reagan Administration. I know that these flights were established practice, because I witnessed one ten years before Reagan was elected.

Along the same lines, Anton misinterprets the potential use of nuclear-armed aircraft flying from American carriers toward the

USSR. In the early Cold War an important part of the American nuclear deterrent was tactical aircraft armed with nuclear weapons and stationed not only on carriers but on land. This continued into the '80s. Naval exercises during the Reagan Administration stressing this capability were in response to an imbalance in Soviet throw weight in the deployment of, for example, the SS-18 (for which the United States had no counterpart), and in response to Soviet "Bear" bombers practicing cruise-missile attack runs toward Alaska. Contrary to what is perhaps unwittingly suggested via imprecise language—"Carrier battle groups repeatedly probed Soviet defenses, launching waves of aircraft to overfly Soviet bases"—these aircraft (which were neither U-2 nor SR-71 high-altitude surveillance craft) did not overfly Soviet bases or even enter Soviet airspace. *Among other things*, this could have started World War III.

It is highly misleading to characterize military exercises and maneuvers as provocations. Common to both sides then and now, these are and were observed, limited, and understood. In the nuclear era, when adversaries are aware of their vulnerability to rapid and total destruction, satellite and electronic surveillance provided even 40 years ago a lot more play in the joints than was common prior to World War I, when mobilizations were often inflammatory, as history confirms.

An Urban Legend

"Nuclear Autumn" attempts to make the case that in 1983 the West was unusually provocative, and, by inference, that it is so today. Among errors—such as those above—derived from inexact knowledge of military operations, one stands out, as it is the cornerstone of the assertion that Soviet actions (specifically the deployment of the SS-20) were

defensive and reactive. That is: not only did the Soviets fear a first strike, but, were it not for the heroic action of a Soviet lieutenant colonel, the U.S. and the USSR might have tumbled into a general nuclear exchange. Why? Because a Russian radar mistakenly showed five incoming U.S. ballistic missiles—possibly wild geese, possibly clouds, possibly electronic malfunction.

The story goes that had the colonel, Stanislav Petrov, reported the sighting, the Soviets, conditioned by the overly aggressive behavior of the West as Anton asserts, would, according to the standard doctrine of both powers, have launched on warning. Thus, he was cinematically immortalized as *The Man Who Saved the World* (2014)…except that he didn't. How do we know this?

We know it because, at the time, neither power was capable of either a successful first strike or of defending against the inevitable retaliatory strike that would follow such an attempt. We and they were well aware of this. We and they, however, were—had to be—prepared to counter even vain attempts, and this manifested itself in the launch-on-warning policy. But the circumstances in which Petrov supposedly saved the world would not have led to that, and the story, which conveniently fits Soviet and Russian encouragement of unilateral disarmament movements, is more like an urban legend than something upon which to build either an understanding of events at the time or the approach to European security now.

Hundreds of missiles at once might have been an insane (and useless) attempt to eliminate Soviet retaliatory capacity, but not five, or even 50, and anyone acquainted with the technicalities—most pertinently Lieutenant Colonel Petrov, his superiors, and senior defense officials—would have known this. Specifically:

Detection. From "Nuclear Autumn:" "According to Bruce Blair, '[t]he top leadership, given only a couple of minutes to decide, told that an attack had been launched, would make a decision to re-

taliate.'" No. Not for many reasons. One, false alarms, technological and otherwise, were not unusual. Two, this report, of the apparently desultory, unevenly spaced launch of only five missiles, was generated by one radar. The Soviets had 7,000 warning systems, of which nine were ICBM/SLBM (intercontinental/submarine-launched ballistic missile) launch-detection satellites, three were long-range, backscatter, over-the-horizon missile detection radars, and, following on these, a large number of complementary systems arrayed at 6,000- and 2,800-kilometer ranges. A universal characteristic of nuclear operations, theirs and ours, is redundancy and concurrence. Unsupported by multiple, varied types of detection—i.e., no concurrence—the report from one site, especially given the nature of the sightings, would not have been the cause of retaliation.

Impossibility of a Successful First Strike. With the later development of precision guidance, a successful nuclear first strike became, if neither wise nor guaranteed, more plausible. But not in 1983. To hit the Soviets' 1,298 ICBM silos, the United States had roughly 3,900 missile-delivered warheads with the accuracy for the objective, assuming all missiles would be launched, which they would not have been. (Additionally, some classes of missile were deliberately made precise enough for only countervalue retaliation: i.e., cities and infrastructure rather than hardened targets.) Subjecting this warhead stock to calculations of circular error probable (CEP) reduces the effective number to 2,251, or 1.7 warheads per silo.

Roughly only half of those that did strike within the 200-meter CEP of the Minuteman II and III missiles (the Poseidon SLBMs were reserved as noted above) might be close enough to kill the silo. This is an estimate, but if to the persistent structural problems of accuracy one adds further obstacles such as launch, propulsion, guidance, and MIRV (multiple, independently targetable reentry

vehicle) failure; Soviet missile defenses (even if only 32 interceptors); weather (which can blow a missile off course); and imponderable silo resistance and survivability, it seems reasonable to reduce the 1.7 warheads per silo to .8, which—long before American bombers could fight their ways through thick Soviet air defenses—would leave 260 potentially intact Soviet land-based missiles to launch against American cities and infrastructure.

In addition, however many of the 980 SLBMs in however many of the 80 Soviet SSBNs (ballistic nuclear submarines) that were already at sea might escape from port and would have survived U.S. attack submarines, plus the Soviet Union's 143 long-range bombers sortieing against hardly adequate North American air defenses, would make an American first strike suicidal. And that is not to mention the 400 Soviet intermediate-range missiles, of which 360 were mobile and more or less untargetable, and which, as a macabre side dish, could have destroyed western Europe.

Anyone with any sense will realize the immense uncertainty of all the calculations above, which, failing a further explication of 20,000 more words, are not here drilled down as far as they can go. But the more you drill down, the greater the uncertainty, and the inherent characteristic of uncertainty perhaps more than anything else served to caution force planners, targeters, and (I say this loosely) statesmen. We knew this, and the Soviet leadership knew and experienced it. They knew as well, despite their insecurity and paranoia, that we had no motive for a first strike. And of course they knew that the anti-nuclear protestors didn't know it, and didn't want to know it.

Now, take the figures above and substitute for the full American arsenal a mere 1%—five missiles—launched in a desultory pattern and picked up by only one of many Soviet warning systems. How real was the possibility of a first strike, and thus how real is the story?

Decapitation. The last trench for the argument that the Soviets may have retaliated to geese or, heeding Aristophanes, the clouds is that even five missiles might have constituted a decapitation strike. First, we were not and could not have been fully confident of the locations or communications of the Soviet leadership and command authorities. Second, given the reduction of efficiencies as treated above, in effect the incoming potential would have been far less than that of five missiles at face value. Third, a nuclear strike on command and control in Moscow would have been countervalue as well, ensuring full retaliation and thus negating whatever the limiting potential of decapitation. Fourth, unlike Washington, Moscow was protected by the aforementioned 32 anti-ballistic missile interceptors. And, fifth, the USSR's land-based missile forces had 300 control centers, and each of its 80 ballistic missile submarines was to some extent semi-autonomous as well. In nuclear warfare, decapitation is not a viable option.

Other misconceptions throughout Anton's essay create a picture of high instability. For example, the assertion that the Soviets feared "that the United States would use SDI [the Strategic Defense Initiative, i.e., missile defense, pejoratively, "Star Wars"] as a shield behind which to launch a first strike."

Perhaps someday in the future it will be possible to construct a truly impervious anti-ballistic-missile shield that will protect both counterforce and countervalue targets, but no such thing is possible just yet and in the early '80s it was absolutely clear to proponents and opponents alike that it was purely aspirational. Even in the future should such a system prove 90% effective, using current inventories as a base for calculation it would allow Russia's surviving 50 strategic missiles, with many more warheads, to lay waste to American cities and infrastructure. How, therefore, could missile defense shield a first strike? It could not.

What then was—and will be into the future—the purpose of missile defense?

Precisely the opposite of its detractor's claim that it will lead to instability by shielding a first strike, it promotes stability by protecting retaliatory capacity. That is, the mirror image of what is detailed immediately above. If an enemy first strike attempts to eliminate American nuclear capacity, and missile defense counters not 90% but even only 10% of the attack, the preserved retaliatory capacity would still be enough to deter a first strike, even accounting for an enemy defense that would by some measure degrade the retaliation. And it is likely that with all the other difficulties of a counterforce strike even in this era of enhanced precision, much more than 10% of our retaliatory capacity would remain. Missile defense discourages rather than encourages a first strike. Despite what Anton presents, we knew this, and the Soviets knew it.

The tenor of "Nuclear Autumn" is revealed in its characterization of the response to the roll out of the SS-20s as "anti-Soviet alarmism," when it was not only a logical and balanced response but, as proved in the pudding, 100% successful. And by its mischaracterization of Herman Kahn as a Dr. Strangelove. This was, and is, the Hollywood conception of the work of people who took upon themselves the unpleasant responsibility of thinking about the unthinkable. Hollywood and the Left have always refused to think about the unthinkable, and it shows.

What Is Ultimately at Stake

Third, what bearing does all this have on the Republican Party's new—or, better, jumping back a (my) lifetime, regurgitated—isolationism, in which the defense concep-

tions of Marjorie Taylor Greene and Ilhan Omar come together at the extremes like a snake biting its own tail?

In regard to the 1983 Missile Crisis, Anton ends up restating so many of the views expressed by the Left at the time: we were approaching Armageddon; we were unnecessarily aggressive; the Soviets acted defensively out of justified fear (of us); only luck prevented disaster; it was a military rather than a political crisis.

Today, of course, there is a real war, but layered upon it is the intensive political warfare intended to influence its course. Chief among Russia's objects in this regard is to disarm Ukraine by separating it from the West. And this it is attempting to do, as of old, with nuclear threats and protestations of victimhood. Nuclear threats must be taken seriously but also objectively, lest Russia be allowed to dictate Western policy by supercharging one of the contending approaches in the debate over what to do.

In 1983 it did a masterful job of this, mobilizing immense segments of the European and American populations egged on by the leftist parties in Europe, the Democrats in the U.S., and highly skilled Soviet disinformation. This was not the imaginary Russian election influence of late but something of an entirely different character.

In 1992, August 5 to be exact, Bob Gates, then director of Central Intelligence, told me something that may not be generally known. When the CIA obtained the archives of the KGB's First Chief Directorate, Service A, "Active Measures"—or what we would call disinformation—these listed 600 American journalists and "opinion makers" in the department's pay. Cautioned by the possibility that the records themselves may have been disinformation, that—as intelligence agencies know how to do so well—many of the recipients may have been unaware of the source of their support, and that making their names public would have resulted in

political strife and a hundred years of litigation, President Bush decided to let sleeping dogs lie. Subsequently, I confirmed this with the president, who cited exactly the same rationale.

One would imagine that not much American bread is being buttered by Vladimir Putin, but we do know that he has supported Marine Le Pen, and that Viktor Orbán, who benefits greatly from continued Russian energy supplies, has a coterie of American conservatives who admire, in my opinion justifiably, many of his stances but who are willing, in my opinion unjustifiably, to continue their association despite Hungary's drag on NATO's response to the invasion of Ukraine, and, at the time of writing, on the accession of Sweden and Finland to the alliance.

Now it is "conservatives" who are saying, as in "Nuclear Autumn," that "war fever" (what war fever?) promotes "the preposterous arguments…that the bomb isn't that bad" (no one reputable or influential says this), and that, "with casual insouciance…elites now speak of nuclear exchanges as an acceptable price to pay for stopping Russia." In fact, elites, plural, do not speak this way even if there may be unhinged individuals here and there who do. These accusations conform to the essay's overall gist that—as supposedly in 1983—the West is to blame, as evident in the characterization that

> [t]here was a time when Russia wanted to be in it [the rules-based international order]; the West said no. Then Russia asked to be left alone. The West encircled it, or made it feel encircled, which in present circumstances amounts to the same thing. Now Russia is being pushed.

So if Russia feels encircled, that means it is encircled, just as if someone feels that he is Napoleon he is Napoleon? It is true that the behavior of both will be conditioned by belief, but it would be

a mistake to defer to such delusions in either case. And no, Russia is not being pushed: rather, it just invaded, yet again, a neighboring country. Neither the Baltic Republics, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, nor Bulgaria wished to be part of, or dominated by, the Soviet Union, and—even if NATO expansion precluded less threatening alternatives (as I argue in "Ukraine: A Tragedy of Errors," Spring 2022)—for them to have asserted and now to maintain their sovereign independence is neither encircling nor pushing Russia. That Ukraine—a large, Western-oriented country that in living memory suffered a Soviet genocide—has had no desire to be part of Russia and is not part of Russia has been proved in the last 30 years of its independence and is certainly being proved now.

With the fantastical, hallucinatory claim that Ukraine, run by Nazis, is a danger to Russia, Russia has invaded an independent state and unleashed upon Europe its greatest war since World War II. It is one thing to modulate our support of Ukraine in view of Russia's destructive powers and to engage in reasonable, accurate debate in that regard. It is another to allow our policy to be checked by inaccurate historical analogies and unrealistic fears. And it is disgraceful to edge toward sympathy for the obvious, undeniable aggressor.

Capitulation—and this is what is in the air—will give our enemies strength, make us weak, and, in the long run, subject the life force of civilization to the rigidities of totalitarian control. That is what ultimately is at stake. After half a century of holding steadfast in the world, what a pity that Republicans are in danger of embracing a posture they have so long abhorred.

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Nuclear Winter's Tale

by Michael Anton

Mark Helprin organizes his response to my essay into three objections. The first is that, *contra* my argument, it is worth risking nuclear confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. The second is that the Soviets had no reason to suspect American intentions in 1983 (or, by implication, at any other time). The unifying theme of the third is less clear, at least to me, though this section makes many points which are clear enough, but all of which were, or could have been, made under the rubric of the first.

Helprin's first objection is undergirded by the assumption that the risk of nuclear confrontation with Russia is low. This assumption blends in with his second objection, since his point in arguing that Soviets had no reason to fear us in 1983, and so didn't go nuclear then, is to assert that Russia has no reason to fear us today and so won't do so now. Actually, to be more precise, Helprin makes a double assumption: that Russia knows it faces no existential threat from us, and so nukes are off the table, but also that Russia absolutely *should* fear us giving more aid to Ukraine, which would (and ought to) cause Russia to lose the war.

These two assumptions are, if not exactly contradictory, at least in tension. Russia should, at the same time, fear and not fear us; or Russia should fear us in a precisely certain way, to a precisely certain degree, that will constrain its behavior in precisely the manner that would give us the precise outcome Helprin wants.

But the main purpose of my piece was to show that matters of war and peace are hard to calibrate, especially in the nuclear age. Helprin at times reads like one of those quantitative political sci-

entists supremely confident that everything can be counted, measured, and calculated to exactness. Nowhere is this more evident than in his middle section, in which he throws out a lot of supposedly impressive statistics to prove that I am "wrong on almost every major point." But he never shows that, not on any point.

Reading the Record

To take just one example, I cite a series of actions that the Reagan Administration took early in the president's first term, intended to shake off the torpor of détente and malaise, and to signal to the Soviets that the United States's dismal decade was over. Helprin seems to dispute this, but a somewhat more careful reading of his litany of complaints reveals no actual counterpoints, allegations of specific errors, or alternative facts. He just raises a lot of questions and brings up a lot of detail about how military exercises are planned, apparently hoping the reader will come away impressed and distracted enough to think he has scored some kind of definitive refutation.

In fact, every action cited in my piece can be verified in contemporaneous reporting and other open-source documentation. I also relied on declassified records, the recollections of the participants (some from their own memoirs, some from interviews), popular and scholarly accounts of military exercises generally and the Reagan presidency specifically, Reagan biographies, plus the former president's own autobiography, all of which state that the incoming administration had a deliberate plan, worked up during the transition, to increase the operations tempo of various "non-kinetic" maneuvers in order to put the Soviets on notice that a new sheriff was in town. I don't claim to be any kind of expert on the period, only to have read this stuff long ago out of personal inter-

est and then to have reread it (plus some material I hadn't before seen, some of which had been declassified in the intervening years) for the writing of "Nuclear Autumn." I'm open to having my account disproved on any point. But then my sources would have to be wrong, too. Helprin artfully tries to convey the impression that he has disproved all of this when in fact he has disproved none of it.

He similarly denies the story of Stanislav Petrov without saying why or citing any sources. I wasn't there, so I can't be sure that what is alleged to have happened actually happened. Leaving aside this epistemological pickle (which could apply to almost any claim about anything, by anyone—including Helprin), there *are* records, written and verbal, that tell the story as I summarized it. Helprin cites no contrary evidence. He just says that the Petrov story sounds implausible to him, therefore it couldn't have happened, and so it didn't happen.

His real objection to my recounting the Petrov episode seems to be that, in his view, it makes the Soviets look too good. Far be it from me to whitewash that murderous regime. But even in the worst tyrannies, good men are still found and they sometimes do good things. Based on the available evidence, this appears to have been one such case.

Actually, Helprin quietly contradicts himself here as well. His explicit objection is that I made Petrov look too good, but he also implies that I made the Soviet leadership look worse than they actually were, because contrary to Petrov's fear (and later analysts' judgment), Helprin insists that Soviet leaders "would not" have launched a counterattack had they been informed of their detection system's false positive. He does not explain how he knows they "would not" have done so. Contrast his unsourced certainty with my sourced circumspection. As I wrote:

> What would have happened had Petrov, per his orders, alerted his superiors? According to Bruce Blair, "[t]he top leadership, given only a couple of minutes to decide, told that an attack had been launched, would make a decision to retaliate." *There's no way to know for sure*. But he didn't, so they couldn't. [Emphasis added.]

Helprin requotes that quote from Blair, only to dismiss it out of hand, never condescending to acknowledge that I had already pointed out the unknowability of the counterfactual. In any case, if Helprin knows that the Soviets "would not" have retaliated, doesn't that make the monsters in the Kremlin a little less monstrous than his whole piece assumes?

Blizzard of Stats

The centerpiece of Helprin's reply is a long passage in which he tosses out an enormous amount of extraneous detail on specific Soviet weapons systems, at times getting so wonky as to sound like an arms control negotiator circa 1972 (an odd stance for a conservative hawk, to say the least). "Throw weights," anyone? When was the last time you heard *that* term? And what relevance could it possibly have to the topic at hand?

The answer is: none. Despite knowing a lot about nuclear matters, I concede that Helprin has demonstrated he can outwonk me on throw weights, launcher-to-silo ratios in 1983, and much else. But all this is irrelevant to the main point, which is: what were the Soviets thinking at the time? All Helprin manages to show with his blizzard of stats is that, in his estimation, the Kremlin *shouldn't* have feared us in 1983. He doesn't establish that they *didn't*.

Again, there are contemporaneous records and later accounts of this. Showing that they're wrong would require a demonstration with countervailing evidence, none of which Helprin provides. And, as I showed, even Ronald Reagan came to understand (or believe) that the Soviets' fear, however misplaced, was genuine. He too might have been wrong, but then his sources would also have to have been wrong, and that also would have to be demonstrated with—something.

Just as Helprin accuses me of being too soft on the Russians, he charges that I am too hard on the Reaganites. To do so, he carefully avoids this passage in my piece: "This is not so much to second-guess the Reagan Administration. It's hard to know what to do in complex matters of war and peace, and the Western alliance definitely needed a boost in the early '80s." My point was not that the administration acted recklessly, much less deliberately so. It's that even a group of men as serious and conscientious as Reagan and his lieutenants, acting in a just cause from noble motives, risked much more than they intended to risk, and without realizing it. Helprin's counter to that, once you see through the squid ink of StratCom irrelevances, is that, again, since Soviets *should not* have felt threatened, they therefore *did not* feel threatened, and in saying otherwise I am repeating Soviet propaganda.

Helprin at several points drops names and makes reference to his military experience, I suppose to insinuate that my judgment on such matters is unreliable because I never served. (Though how can I be a chickenhawk when I'm the one advocating for less belligerence and more circumspection?) I suppose I could counter-name-drop my six years in the national security bureaucracy through two administrations and five years of teaching national security and strategy at the college and graduate levels. Instead, I will just point out that a former military man ought to be familiar with the old

adage that "the enemy gets a vote." So even if it's true that the Soviets had no rational, justifiable reason to fear the Western alliance in 1983, it's still possible that they did, simply because they, and not us—and certainly not Mark Helprin, retroactively—got to decide what scared them and what didn't.

Is It Reasonable?

A similar question suffuses Helprin's objection to my judgment about today. Sounding like a voice in the regime-uniparty-neoliberal-media-military-diplomatic-intelligence-think-tank chorus, he is quick to impugn the motives of anyone who dares suggest that Russia today might have reason to feel threatened. To make such a dastardly suggestion is to reveal oneself as a pro-Putin appeaser.

To get his point across, Helprin resorts to an extraordinary act of selective quotation that can only be called dishonest. It's true, I did write that

> [t]here was a time when Russia wanted to be in it [the rules-based international order]; the West said no. Then Russia asked to be left alone. The West encircled it, or made it feel encircled, which in present circumstances amounts to the same thing. Now Russia is being pushed.

He cuts the final sentence off midway, without so much as the obligatory ellipses, prodding the reader to conclude that I said "Russia is being pushed"…to what? Obliterate Ukraine? In fact, what I said was that "Russia is being pushed not so much to destroy [the rules-based international] order, which in any case it lacks the power to do, as to work with others to build a parallel one." This is

undeniably true. Does Helprin dispute it? And have we not guaranteed that outcome by, for example, cutting Russia off from international payment systems that we purport to operate neutrally? What should we expect the Russians to do? Conclude, "Well, it's right and just that we can't use SWIFT anymore; I guess that means no more international transactions for the motherland"? My larger point was that "it would be ironic if, in its overzealous defense of the 'liberal international order,' the West ended up driving together its adversaries, and even one erstwhile proto-ally (India), to create the first viable alternative to that order since 1945." Anyway, if you need to stoop to this level of chicanery to score a point, you're not arguing from a position of strength.

"So, if Russia feels encircled," Helprin continues, "that means it is encircled, just as if someone feels that he is Napoleon he is Napoleon?" No—but see above. If Russia *feels* encircled, well, then Russia may act as if it is, in fact, encircled, regardless of what Helprin or anyone else thinks is Russia's actual situation.

Helprin is convinced that the rectitude of the West's motives in aiding Ukraine ought to preclude any undue blowback. This may be true on some abstract moral level, but not in the real world. You might be within your First Amendment rights to shout slurs in an ethnic neighborhood, but you are still greatly increasing your chances of getting beaten up. That your assailants might be morally wrong to thrash you would not alleviate your injuries. The flipside of this conviction is the insistence that any suggestion that the West back off so as not to contribute to Russia's feelings of encirclement (however paranoid) amounts to appeasement. Since Helprin knows the cause is just, Russia's feelings don't matter.

But they do matter, because those feelings might lead to something very bad. Should that happen, Helprin might take consolation that his side's allegedly superior justice absolves them of all

blame, but I wouldn't. Since the consequences of that blowback would fall equally on all of us, my side no less than the enemy's also gets (or should get) a vote.

The core of our disagreement is whether, in antagonizing Russia, the United States is taking any risks and whether, if so, Ukraine is worth those risks. One more point before leaving behind the first consideration. Helprin accuses me of making up some of the most outrageously reckless rhetoric of the pro-war ruling class, including the presently fashionable insouciant talk of nuclear exchanges. "No one reputable or influential says this," he asserts. I suppose that depends on the meanings of those two adjectives. In fact, as he not only declines to admit but insinuates the opposite, I did name and quote one such: Anne Applebaum, a Pulitzer Prize winner with prestigious perches at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and *The Atlantic*. I am much more likely than Helprin to question whether Applebaum any longer deserves her accolades, but there can be no question that, in the elite and mainstream consciousness, she remains both reputable and influential.

As to Ukraine's relevance to the United States, I am persuaded by the late Angelo Codevilla ("What's Russia to Us?," Summer 2019) that Ukraine is—and more to the point, is perceived in the Kremlin to be—a vital interest of Russia, but is at best a peripheral interest of ours. One elementary mistake of statecraft is taking your adversary to the wall over something he considers a vital organ but that to you is a minor appendage, if that. That's what it appears to me we are at risk of doing with Russia over Ukraine. Helprin is convinced there is no risk. He not only never explains how he knows that, he never even explains how he *could* know it. On what basis—what set of facts, figures, or special insight into the Russian mind—does his certainty rest?

Contrast that attitude with that of Herman Kahn, a scholar-thinker whom Helprin falsely claims I impugn. It was not I but Stanley Kubrick (with an assist from Kahn himself, who talked to Kubrick at great length) who "mischaracterize[d]" Kahn as "Dr. Strangelove." I referenced and quoted Kahn precisely to show that no one had thought about nuclear issues more deeply, or marshalled more facts and numbers to the effort—and yet Kahn himself still admitted, after all that work, the ultimate unknowability of how a nuclear conflict might go or where it might lead. Helprin, methinks, could learn something from Kahn about humility, circumspection, and the limits of human reason.

Codevilla concluded that an independent Ukraine—meaning one with all its pre-2014 territory, plus its Russian-majority regions totally disconnected from Moscow—is in any case "beyond our capacity to secure." I agree and don't see how that has changed because of the war. America's ability to project power and impose its will is in decline. Is it really reasonable to believe that a country which could not, in 20 years, defeat a premodern, impoverished adversary can somehow easily have its way with the world's largest nuclear power? In a country more than 5,000 miles from us, but that shares a 1,400-mile border with Russia?

Besides, America has pressing domestic problems which are more urgent *for us* than anything happening in Ukraine and that demand solutions before the United States can again be a coherent, powerful actor on the world stage. But still our elites—Helprin among them—cry for more Western action in Ukraine. Victor Davis Hanson has observed that "societies in decline fixate on impossible postmodern dreams as a way of disguising their inability to address premodern problems." I suspect the same is true in foreign affairs: countries that can't keep trains on the tracks or raise enough chickens to meet demand for eggs instead go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.

Goodbye to Adventurism

Sprinkled throughout Helprin's reply are the usual and expected, if nevertheless still tiresome and empty, charges of "isolationism," "capitulation," and the like. Capitulation to what? Helprin never establishes what dog the United States has in this fight or how the American people might suffer if Russia wins the war—as, it seems to me, Russia, as the vastly greater power, could still do, absent some vastly greater Western provision of military aid to Ukraine, which might provoke Russia to do God-knows-what. Yes, yes, I agree that Putin is responsible for his own actions. But so are we responsible for ours, and if we do something that precipitates a wider war, that will be on us, even if Putin is a villain who never should have invaded in the first place.

Anyway, those words are just insults, with all the depth of that meme going around showing a children's book entitled *Everyone I Don't Like Is a Russian Bot*. These taunts convey little force anymore. I suppose they may work on people of a certain age, with a certain recollection of the Cold War and its alleged lessons. But anyone who knows anything about the broader sweep of American history knows that our country was "isolationist"—i.e., eager to mind its own business and unwilling to expend its blood and treasure in peripheral regions or on others' quarrels—far longer than it has been interventionist.

There was a time when the mere invocation of the i-word would cause interventionism's critics to scurry defensively away, but those days are over. On the Right, the young in particular have no patience for this sort of thing anymore: neither the interventionism itself nor the cheap accusation of "isolationism." If anything, the young Right is apt to embrace the label "isolationist" as a way of owning the insult.

The will to engage in this kind of adventurism today still exists only in the breasts of our ruling class, above all in its rapidly aging leadership. There are some on the young Left who go along out of obedience to their chiefs, but their interventionism lacks all conviction. And, as America's competency declines—not just in military matters but in everything—the ruling class's ability to successfully get its way will wane along with popular enthusiasm for foreign activism.

The sentiments Helprin expresses represent the last gasp of a way of thinking that served its purpose when the United States faced an external threat that was truly existential. It serves no purpose now, when Russia has difficulty crossing the Dnieper, much less the Vistula, and when the most pressing threats to America's survival are domestic.

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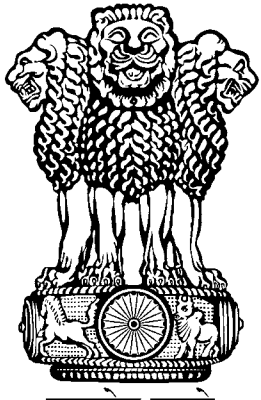

सत्यमेव जयते

State Emblem of India, adopted in 1950.
The design is based on an architectural sculpture, the Lion Capital of Asoka at Sarnath, c. 250 B.C. The motto Satyameva Jayete, *which means "Truth Alone Triumphs," is written in Devanagari script.*

Essay by Christopher Caldwell

India's Uprising

The world's largest democracy, united as never before.

Last fall and winter, Rahul Gandhi, a 52-year-old member of India's parliament, led thousands of people on a 146-day, 2,500-mile walk across India. Along the rural highways from southernmost coastal Kanyakumari to the foot of the Himalayas, parliamentary colleagues, election strategists, and local party hacks and gofers jostled bloggers and issue activists and plain old hikers. Though scarcely noticed outside of India, the Bharat Jodo Yatra—the "Unite India March"—was one of the great feats of

Books mentioned in this essay:

The Idea of India, by Sunil Khilnani. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 304 pages, $21 (paper)

Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi, by Vinay Sitapati. Viking, 424 pages, $24.95

The Indian Ideology: Expanded Edition, by Perry Anderson. Verso, 272 pages, $24.95 (paper)

The New BJP: Modi and the Making of the World's Largest Political Party, by Nalin Mehta. Westland, 840 pages, $49.50

mass mobilization in our time. It was a logistical triumph: preparing three square meals for an army of thousands; pitching camp in a new place each night, sometimes in the middle of big, run-down cities, sometimes in rural communities with untrustworthy water; setting up mattress-crammed tents where hundreds of marchers could nap en route, with party donors snoring away next to outstretched feminist intellectuals and recumbent Bhil tribal leaders; and above all keeping order and avoiding violence. Funny though the spectacle sometimes appeared to a non-Indian, it involved exactly the sort of organizing that a well-informed electorate looks for in a ruling party.

Rahul Gandhi is heir to one of the democratic world's great family dynasties, and to the party that it long controlled: the Indian National Congress, known colloquially as "Congress." He has

for much of his career come off as feckless and even a bit apolitical; after leading the Congress himself for a couple of years, he stepped aside in 2019. His party's public image has been fading. In the late 20th century, India was, like Mexico, an odd mix between a democracy and a one-party state—which reflects as well on the party as it does poorly on the democracy. Today, some Congress supporters worry that their party is no longer really even a national one at all, so unpopular has it become in parts of the "cow belt" of pious Hindu villages that cover the Indian center and north. In the Dravidian south, strong local parties have arisen to defend a variety of local languages and cultures, not to mention a booming tech economy. And yet the march ran straight through some of the most Congress-skeptical of India's two-dozen federal states. In rural Madhya Pradesh, run by the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), people thronged the streets. Shopkeepers turned out. Aboriginal tribesmen and -women came from miles around. Mobs of men pushed chain-link fences for a closer look. Some held armfuls of floral garlands to throw. Women with covered heads lined the roadsides in their best saris, simple or snazzy. For Rahul Gandhi it was an act of great partisan courage.

And personal courage, too. Rahul's great-grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru, still beloved to progressives and socialists at home and abroad, became India's first prime minister when it emerged as a republic from British imperial rule in 1947. Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, Rahul's grandmother, herself ran the Congress party and the country for almost two decades on Nehruvian principles, albeit with a harder and more authoritarian edge, until she was assassinated in 1984. ("Gandhi" is a fairly common Indian surname that Indira acquired through marriage; the family is not related to Mohandas Gandhi.) Rahul's father, Rajiv Gandhi, succeeded his mother and served out a five-year term as prime minister in the

1980s. In the following decade he too would be killed, blown up on a trip to Tamil Nadu by a suicide terrorist. In this dynastic and dangerous democracy, the Nehru-Gandhi family is a monarchical presence. It represents India as India-watchers have understood it for many generations. There is an understandable feeling among Rahul's supporters that he is destined to rule.

India United

But he is not destined to rule. The problem for his Congress party, and for the intellectuals and other march-joiners who would unite the country around the old Nehruvian "Idea of India," is that the country is in fact united as it has never been before—just around a different set of principles. Narendra Modi, the 72-year-old Hindu activist from Gujarat, has been prime minister since 2014. His father was a railroad station tea seller. A rare member of India's "backward" castes to reach his country's top post, he is the antitype of the urbane Nehru, and the movement he leads is the antithesis of Congress as Nehru reshaped it. Under Modi's leadership the BJP, founded in 1980 and focused on the aspirations of the 80% of Indians who are Hindu, has become the world's largest political party. Political scientists say India has moved on to a "second party system" with the BJP at its center, much as the first party system was dominated by Congress.

India's tiny sliver of Western-connected English-language opinion-makers tend to find Modi appalling. Their minoritarian take has hardened into Western conventional wisdom about India: Modi is understood as a subcontinental Viktor Orbán or Donald Trump. He is a demagogue, a populist, a reactionary. Some accuse Modi of religious fundamentalism, or of bigotry against India's Muslims. He cares little for the rights of women and gays, say

others. For certain opponents his sin is nationalism, for others it is cozying up to India's billionaire tech moguls and venture capitalists. As the marching thousands of the Congress party poured into a village called Ghatiya in rural Madhya Pradesh, one English-speaking intellectual said he was marching against Modi to prevent the "onslaught of fascism."

This is not how India's modestly situated monoglots see Modi. Nor does it make sense. Western populist leaders are all, in one way or another, trying to stem the decadence of their once-great countries. Modi's India has plenty of problems, but decadence isn't one of them. This winter it passed China as the world's largest country, and its population is poised to keep growing past mid-century. India has nuclear weapons. In a period of international tension it has managed to win ever-closer military cooperation with the United States, while engaging in ever-closer trade relations with Russia. It graduates more English-speaking science and tech professionals than any country on earth. It has vast urban areas with multiple millions of people that even well-educated Westerners may never have heard of—Vadodara, Indore, Visakhapatnam, Nashik—where you can, for better or for worse, shop at Forever 21 and eat at Taco Bell. This does not mean the country is Western, or even that it aspires to be. Signs in the modern subway in the capital city of Delhi instruct riders not to sit on the floor. In the winter months, curtains of gray smoke envelop Delhi, but not from industrial pollution. Peasant farmers, upwind in the state of Haryana, need to harvest rice and plant wheat in the same fields in the space of a few weeks, and do so by setting vast expanses of cropland on fire. From developers making a killing off the tech economy to pious villagers shocked at what their children are learning about sex on their cellphones, India is dividing into ever-better-organized political pressure

groups. How to keep all of them happy is not obvious. Modi has managed it better than any of his contemporaries.

The political advisory group Morning Consult keeps track of two dozen world leaders' popularity, and Modi is generally in a class by himself. In February he stood at 78% approval and 19% disapproval—extraordinary for a leader nine years into the job. Only Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador, at 63%, is even in the ballpark. Joe Biden is at 40. Emmanuel Macron is at 27. Modi wins and wins big because Indians see him as the embodiment of a different idea of India, a majoritarian one that, necessarily or not, was suppressed in the 20th century.

The Gandhian Legacy

The Indian republic is the product of an uprising against a British Empire whose picturesqueness should not distract us from its brutality. The uprising was, naturally, a radical enterprise. Yet it was led by a conservative Hindu who fasted, prayed, and practiced celibacy, and who hated modern machinery. "It behoves every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilisation even as a child clings to its mother's breast," wrote Mohandas Gandhi, the nationalist leader known as the Mahatma, or "great soul."

Gandhi was ruthless. Americans may think of his doctrine of *satyagraha*, or passive resistance, as having drawn on something they possess in abundance: niceness. No. On the contrary, it drew on things that are in very short supply in Western democracies: self-abnegation and a willingness to endure suffering and even violence. It was meant not to flatter or cajole the colonial occupier but, reasonably or not, to remove from him every last scrap of moral legitimacy.

There were two sides to Gandhi. We know him as an ecumenical progressive, and that he was: he wanted to enlist all of India's religions in building the new democracy—not just Hindus but also Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains. He was willing to go quite far in accommodating Muslims, even campaigning for the restoration of the Ottoman caliphate, toppled after World War I.

But Gandhi was also a Hindu, a member of the majority. Mass democracy promised to be more complicated for religious minorities. Under the British raj, Muslims in particular, a quarter of the population, had been protected from Hindu numerical dominance by what we might call an equality of subjugation. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a not particularly pious upper-crust Bombay Muslim, thought that Indian Islam was doomed unless Muslims could be granted some kind of veto—an Indian version of what John C. Calhoun called a "concurrent majority." The mass of Hindus was dead set against it. Failing that, Jinnah inclined toward a Muslim secession, the setting up of an independent Pakistan, which Gandhi was willing to do almost anything to prevent. Gandhi's own goodwill may have blinded him to how difficult this would be.

Gandhi had two heirs apparent among the Congress movement's freedom fighters. They vied jealously with one another. One was his fellow Gujarati lawyer Vallabhbhai "Sardar" Patel, a politician of almost preternatural practical abilities and an intense loyalty to Gandhi. The other was Nehru, privileged, educated at Harrow and Cambridge (where his friends called him "Joe"), charming, shaped by modern progressive doctrines and curious about the Soviet Union. The historian Sunil Khilnani gives an elegant summary in *The Idea of India* (1997) of the choice that faced Gandhi: "One [Patel] wanted the state simply to express and tend the existing pattern of India's society, with all its hierarchy, particularity and religious tastes; the other [Nehru] hoped to use the state actively to recon-

stitute India's society, to reform it and to bring it in line with what he took to be the movement of universal history."

Gandhi chose Nehru. For devout Hindus this was a disappointment. Nehru was uninterested in religion and even suspicious of it. To use a distinction one often hears from Indian historians, the country was moving from Gandhi and Patel's "all-religion secularism" to Nehru's "no-religion secularism." At just this moment, Nathuram Godse, a onetime Gandhi-ite disappointed in his former hero's indulgence of Muslims, shot Gandhi dead in a garden in Delhi. Gandhi's assassin had at one time been swept up in the activities of the National Volunteer Organization (RSS), the most important of the Hindu fellowships, and had also been a protégé of the radical historian Vinayak Damodar "Veer" Savarkar.

Historians differ on whether Godse any longer frequented the RSS, and on the nature of his contacts with Savarkar. But they do not differ on the upshot: in a single moment, the country's overwhelming Hindu majority had lost its most important leader, and seen Hindu political assertiveness disgraced and discredited for what would turn out to be half a century. The most powerful political currents in republican India, the passions of hundreds of millions of people, would not even be in the political system's field of vision.

The Nehru System

For much of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, Nehru-style government hopped along on just one of its two Gandhian feet, the progressive one. Nehru's preference was an economy along socialist lines: five-year plans, lavishing state resources on heavy industry, extracting money from small-time businessmen through onerous licensing fees. People called the system the License Raj.

Even those who honor Nehru's work in building democratic institutions consider his economic policies a catastrophe in retrospect. The Columbia University economist Arvind Panagariya, for instance, has written that India would have been better to follow the path the East Asian "tiger" economies did—to build its way into competitiveness by taking advantage of its most important resource: cheap labor. When Indira Gandhi took over from her father in 1966, she took an even more aggressive approach to planning. By 1981 the country was being propped up by loans from the International Monetary Fund, and currency controls meant that Indians traveling abroad were unable to carry much more money than it would take to buy a meal in a nice Western restaurant.

The Indian Constitution, one of the world's longest, was ratified in 1949. It managed the relationship between faiths much as the British raj had, giving each of India's major religions the leeway to run its own affairs. So an Indian Muslim, even today, has the liberty to practice polygamy, while an Indian Hindu does not. What was most innovative about the constitution was that it invented the modern practice of affirmative action. Its great conceptualizer and drafter was B.R. Ambedkar, a social-science polymath, a lecturer at Columbia University, a radical political reformer, and a *dalit*, or "untouchable," from the lowest reaches of India's complex caste system, against which he held an understandable grudge. One of the things that made the constitution so long is that it laid out a "schedule" of 1,109 castes and 775 aboriginal tribes who would be eligible for "reservations," or quotas, securing them a quarter of the seats in India's parliament and granting them a quarter of government jobs. But only government jobs—in this respect, India's affirmative-action system, however much it may have been belittled for its complexity, was actually less intrusive than the American one, with its litigation-fueled undermining of meritocracy in the private sector.

Hindus who were neither tribal nor religious minorities and belonged to one of the middling castes felt like white heterosexual males in the 21st-century United States—the constitution was a bag filled with goodies for everyone but them. They bitterly resented the Congress party's "vote banks": ethnic, religious, and caste blocs rallied by promises of government favor. Muslims were long especially loyal to Congress. The system might be said to have stabilized the country by allowing minorities, acting in concert, to tie down the Hindu goliath. But Hindus were discontented with it. And there was a potential danger: should the Hindu majority ever begin behaving like a patronage-seeking vote bank, as it had incentives to do, then the whole system might erupt.

Things began to destabilize. Indira Gandhi imposed martial law in 1974 when an opposition politician called her government unlawful, beginning a traumatic three years known as "The Emergency." Over that time, and under pressure from Western governments, she initiated a population-control program that saw the forced sterilization of more than 6 million men. The 1977 election brought a shock victory for a coalition that included Hindu activists. The government was for the most part ineffectual, though it set up the so-called Mandal Commission, which a decade later would draw a new list of "other backward classes," including Modi's, into the system of reservations. When Indira returned to power in 1980, certain disappointed Hindus from the short-lived governing coalition broke off from it and founded the BJP. In the spring of 1984, Indira ordered a raid on the stronghold of the charismatic Sikh radical Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in Amritsar, during which he was killed. Four months later, Indira was assassinated by her machine gun-wielding Sikh bodyguards on the way to a TV interview with Peter Ustinov. Her supporters rioted in Delhi for four days, killing 2,800 Sikhs.

With religious contention of all kinds on the rise, Rajiv Gandhi was elected in 1984 in a landslide to replace his mother. His five-year term turned out to be the last hurrah of the Nehru/Gandhi dynasty. (His own assassination in 1991 would come later, after he had left office.) Rajiv's most important legacy involved a 1985 Supreme Court case that divided Hindus from Muslims and still echoes down the decades. Shah Bano, a Muslim woman from Indore, was dumped and left penniless by her husband of 46 years. The court established a right to alimony for Muslim women—something Muslims had eschewed as contrary to Islamic law. This violation of Muslim religious autonomy brought Muslim outrage but Hindu approval. The fledgling BJP argued—and still does—for a "uniform civil code," i.e., for treating all religions the same. In a Western context, as BJP supporters often point out, this would constitute liberalism, secularism, common sense. But in Indian (or at least Nehruvian) terms, it means a denial of Muslim rights.

Rajiv, now anxious over his Muslim vote bank, pushed a law through the legislature withdrawing the right to alimony. In 1986, anxious over the unexpected Hindu backlash, he promised to permit Hindu prayer in the Babri Masjid, a mosque in the holy city of Ayodhya. Hindus claimed it had been the site of a Hindu temple, before Muslim Moghul rulers conquered India in the 16th century. Two years later, Rajiv tried to make up with Muslims by banning the import of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, against which Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had just issued a fatwa. He concluded this period of vacillation by endorsing the construction of a Hindu temple in Ayodhya. That name would become the symbol—glorious or frightening according to your views—of the uncompromising Hinduism Modi represented.

The Age of Ayodhya

Even today, many Indians have a hard time explaining exactly what it was about Ayodhya that, in 1992, turned Hindus toward a radical new kind of politics. It is worth noting that, in the mid-1980s, Doordarshan, the Indian public broadcaster, began showing television adaptations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, two of Hinduism's ancient epics, and these seized the imagination of the whole country. Activists had become convinced that the Ayodhya mosque stood on the site of the birthplace of Rama (or Ram), an avatar (what a Westerner might call an incarnation) of the god Vishnu. Two groups now pushed for a Hindu mandir at Ayodhya: there was the RSS, the national Hindu activist group out of which Narendra Modi rose, founded in the 1920s and still active today, and there was a newer society called the Vishva Hindu Parishad, many of whose members were calling for the outright destruction of the existing mosque. The fledgling BJP, which after 1989 was part of the government, campaigned alongside them both. In late 1990, a country-crossing pilgrimage to Ayodhya by BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani culminated in Advani's arrest and the government's collapse. When Hindu protesters showed up in Ayodhya that December, soldiers opened fire on them twice in three days, killing dozens and outraging the public. The authorities were more lenient when 150,000 Hindus returned in 1992. That didn't work much better. The protesters overwhelmed security lines and attacked the complex with pickaxes. In a few hours the centuries-old mosque had been reduced to dust. Vinay Sitapati's recent history, *Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi* (2020), tells this story in spellbinding detail.

Ayodhya shocked the world, which continued to view India through a cosmopolitan/Nehruvian lens, but a large part of Hindu

India was pleased. The Anglo-Trinidadian novelist V.S. Naipaul said at the time that Babur, who had built the mosque, had

> had contempt for the country he had conquered. And his building of that mosque was an act of contempt for the country.... The construction of a mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult, an insult to an ancient idea, the idea of Ram.

In retrospect, that was how Modi felt, too—in 2021 he would lay the cornerstone for a Hindu temple on the site of the mosque.

The destruction at Ayodhya was followed by Hindu-Muslim confrontations across India in which 2,000 people died. But the most serious fallout for Modi came a decade later, by which time he was serving as governor of Gujarat. In February 2002, a train full of Hindu activists returning from Ayodhya stopped in the Gujarati station of Godhra. Muslim toughs surrounded the train and lit it on fire, and all 59 of the pilgrims on board were incinerated. In hundreds of villages across Gujarat, Hindus went berserk; at the end of three nights, 2,000 people had been killed, 1,272 of them Muslim. Accounts of Modi's role have diverged widely. It has been alleged that he ordered the police not to intervene. Official inquiries undertaken long before he arrived at national power have exonerated him. Some even say he did well to control the violence in 72 hours, noting that there were more Sikhs killed in Delhi after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 than there were Muslims under Modi in the considerably more far-flung and harder-to-police state of Gujarat. Whether cautiously or credulously, the George W. Bush Administration accepted the anti-Modi view, denying him a U.S. visa in 2005. The Obama Administration lifted the ban.

Vinay Sitapati's account is subtle and paradoxical. India's human-rights activists and English-language press tried to present Modi as the scourge of Islam, in hopes of driving him out of politics. But there wasn't sufficient evidence to justify this, and describing him that way had the opposite effect on Hindus across India. They were now convinced that their Muslim fellow citizens had been swept up in a global religious war—this was, remember, just a few months after September 11, 2001—and that Modi was the only one who could protect Hindus. The BJP happened to be holding a convention in Goa a few weeks later. Moderate elements in the BJP, probably including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, planned on calling on Modi to resign, but when Modi spoke the crowd gave him a deafening roar of support. From that point on, Modi was a national leader.

Hindutva and High Tech

Modi's detractors commonly call his party "Hindu nationalist." It would be better described as Hindu *and* nationalist. The BJP is built on the so-called Hindutva awakening of a century ago. In 1923 the Brahmin intellectual Veer Savarkar invented the term in a book called *Essentials of Hindutva*. Savarkar was a brilliant extremist. His history of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, *The Indian Revolution* (1909), was the first to reconceive that episode—quite correctly—as the start of a war of independence. The book was banned, and would not be republished until India was independent in 1947. Savarkar was imprisoned in miserable conditions in the Andaman islands for, among other things, gun-smuggling and conspiring to murder a British official. He was, as we know, a mentor of Godse, Gandhi's killer. Two things are at first sight more surprising: First, he was

an outspoken atheist. Second, he was an active public opponent of the caste system, which many outsiders to Hinduism consider essential to the religion. So Hindutva, as Savarkar launched it, refers to the culture of the land of India more than to Hinduism, and the politics that results from it is nationalist rather than theocratic.

In 1925, the physician K.P. Hedgewar founded the RSS to rally Hindu men to public service. They were soon meeting daily in 100,000 villages across India, as they still do, with an *esprit de corps* protected by an order of trained (and celibate) *pracharaks*, or "promoters." The RSS was conceived as an apolitical group, but its organizing power and sheer numbers have always made it a potential vote bonanza for Hindu parties, from the Jana Sangh in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s to the BJP today. And that is leaving aside the family of sympathetic organizations, the so-called Sangh Parivar, that grew up around it. Support from the RSS has transformed Hindutva from the hobby of a few Brahmin intellectuals into the largest mass political movement the world has ever seen. But this support has never been automatic. It seems more so today, but only because Modi himself rose out of the RSS, not out of traditional politics. He became a pracharak in 1972 (after a brief early marriage), and was detailed to the BJP by the RSS in the 1980s to help halt its drift toward moderation under leader (and eventual prime minister) Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

What is important about so-called Hindu nationalism is, first, its stunning practical capabilities—supporters and detractors liken the RSS's followers to "termites." And second, the BJP's nationalism, which is more important politically than its Hinduism. Nationalist politics no longer exist in quite this way in the United States, but those who remember the late 20th century will do better to think of Pat Buchanan than of Pat Robertson. It would

give a misimpression of how Modi rules if we addressed religious questions first, because many aspects of Modi's regime resemble the familiar politics of Western countries.

India's electorate presents certain challenges to an elected official. It is a poor population, with a per capita income still under $2,500 a year. But that population is in love with gadgetry, so Indian voters are wired into internet news and gossip and social media insults the way a rich country is. India has 750 million smartphones—60% of adults have them, roughly the American proportion of a decade ago. This networking is new—it was only in the 1990s that literacy passed 50% nationwide, and that Indians were offered more than a single television channel for watching national news.

Like Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Modi sees himself as replacing a bureaucratic elite based in the capital with a more entrepreneurial elite based in the provinces. Like Viktor Orbán in Hungary, he is bent on using the state to give even those who don't agree with him a reason to vote for him. He has almost nothing in common with Donald Trump. Yes, Modi is ideological, but he is under too much scrutiny, and under too much pressure to improve living standards, to govern only through ideological stunts and inconsequential trolling. He must deliver practical improvements in living standards—or at least be seen to deliver them. So, in the final weekend before last December's state election in Gujarat, he traveled to Goa to open the new international airport and address the World Ayurveda Congress; then to the Maharashtrian city of Nagpur (population 3 million) to launch the first stage of a new subway system, a new expressway, a new railway, and a new pollution abatement plant; and finally to his native state to dedicate a Metro line in Ahmedabad (population 6 million) and a canal in Kutch.

India, while dirty and disorderly in places, is not the nightmare of standing water and sidewalk defecation that travelers routinely described a generation ago. Modi has installed hundreds of millions of taps, toilets, and gas lines in hundreds of millions of houses. A good number of the BJP's signature programs, particularly in tech matters, are not its own inventions but were inherited from previous governments. Modi's contribution has been to scale them up, often for reasons of combatting corruption. "Demonetization"—withdrawing large-denomination bills from circulation to fight money-laundering—was tried in the 1970s. The BJP did it again in 2016 to much ridicule abroad, but authorities claim the move worked, and opinion polls show no lasting resentment at the inconvenience. A cellphone payments system was launched more than a decade ago, which Modi has bundled with the welfare system, the banking system, and a controversial facial recognition software. In about a year and a half almost a billion people were equipped with a "Unique ID Authority" and a bank account. So, you can use your cell phone to pay your light bill, buy a car, or give money to a beggar. You can board a plane in several airports by just looking into a camera. India now accounts for 40% of the world's digital transactions.

This digitization has come at a worrisome cost in privacy. On the other hand, it has indeed done a great deal to curb corruption. Village political bosses have been prevented from taking a cut from welfare recipients. Administrators can no longer boost school funds by putting fictional pupils on the rolls. Probably the worst symbol of the corruption of Indian democracy until a few years ago was that votes in far-flung states were often not tallied until days after elections took place. Now they can be counted in three hours or so, and are available on election night. In this sense, India is a Third World country no more.

Ridiculous Diplomacy

India has one of the world's simpler foreign policies. Freshly emerged from colonial domination, working with limited financial resources, it has not been inclined to participate in "outside wars." India stayed out of Iraq and the various iterations of the U.S. war on terror. It declares it has no permanent alliances, though that is not wholly true. It leaned heavily on the Soviet Union, starting in the 1970s, developing a dependence on Russian military hardware that lasted until the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014. It continues to buy Russian weaponry, albeit at a lower rate. Today, India is a member, alongside Japan, Australia, and the United States, of the informal "Quad" group meant to tame China's global ambitions. And its problems with China may draw it closer still to the United States.

India has a 2,100-mile-long border with China, over which it lost a war in 1962, a humiliating final act in Nehru's career that saw him drawn overconfidently into battle like a subcontinental Napoleon III. Today, there are 50,000 troops on each side of the border. Over the last three years they have engaged in a series of odd clashes. Seemingly instructed not to fire on one another, they have nonetheless hurled insults, exchanged blows, and wound up in rumbles in which dozens of soldiers have been punched and clubbed and stoned to death. The last such encounter came in December in Arunachal Pradesh. As China declares its intention to project power abroad with a "blue-water" navy, as it sends its ships to friendly ports in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, India is starting to feel encircled.

That does not mean India is ready to break its rule against outside conflicts and help the United States wage war against Russia in Ukraine. India depends on Russian energy and, just as much,

on Ukrainian fertilizer. Its rationale for rejecting U.S. sanctions is that the war is the result of a diplomatic failure between Russia and NATO—not something a poor, uninvolved country like India should pay the price for. India is importing almost five times as much oil from Russia as it did before, and at bargain prices. But the country's capable foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar insisted to *The New York Times* last winter that that was still only one sixth of the Russian energy that Europe continues to import: "If a $60,000-per-capita society feels it needs to look after itself…," he said, "they should not expect a $2,000-per-capita society to take a hit."

Principles aside, many Indian diplomats believe the United States is destroying the foundations of the global system it built up. Knocking Russia out of the SWIFT payment system, sanctioning the foreign minister and families of Duma members: "This is an emotional, ridiculous way to conduct diplomacy," said one in an off-the-record conversation in Delhi last fall.

Against Lutyens' Delhi

There is one thing about Modi's role as India's leader that modern Westerners will find especially foreign: that his lack of a family should be something to boast about. Modi is single and childless, though he was married briefly in 1968—something the public discovered only when he was required to disclose it before the 2014 elections. In the United States, bachelorhood is reason to worry that a politician is a weirdo. In India's 75-year history, though, all parties, even the most democratic among them, have turned into family concerns—with Communists and the BJP accounting for the only long-running exceptions. Modi's bachelorhood argues for his incorruptibility.

Modi is constantly presenting himself as the scourge of "Lutyens' Delhi," using the name of the English architect who designed the imposing governmental buildings that served as the seat of power in the last days of the British Empire—and do still. It is Modi's contention that elite journalists, NGO activists, and lawyers exercise the old imperial prerogatives instinctively. He calls them the "Khan Market Gang," after the expensive Bohemian neighborhood where they shop for books and snack on un-Indian things like avocado toast and cappuccino. There they are now, sitting in the Turtle Café, complaining—after 75 years of imposing their school chums and law partners on universities, boardrooms, and the Indian public—that the Modi government has "captured" their institutions.

Today's Hindu uprising is not always motivated by specifically Hindu things. It is often just a wish that elitist institutions be replaced by something more representative—something that allows hitherto excluded people to feel a certain amount of pride in their background. A frequent complaint of V.S. Naipaul was that India was the only country that expected its authoritative histories and national myths to be written by foreigners. This fall the first medical school textbook was published in Hindi—the language of a scientifically inclined population of 600 million people. Modi's home minister, Amit Shah, attended the launch party. The historian Mukul Kesavan, though far from a supporter of Modi, noted nonetheless that the "hyper-educated liberals" of the subcontinent were almost totally ignorant of Hindi fiction, poetry, and journalism. He laments: "When a demagogue like Modi takes a swipe at the likes of [Nobel-winning Harvard economist] Amartya Sen with a motto like 'hard work is better than Harvard,' knowing anglophones might snigger but it resonates amongst people who have been at the receiving end of this privileged knowingness forever."

Modi is constantly showing his people that it's their turn to set

the cultural tone. The conservative founding father Sardar Patel, for instance, was a footnote in the Nehruvian narrative of India's history until 2018, when Modi unveiled a statue of Patel in Gujarat. It is taller by far than any ever built—twice the height of the Statue of Liberty, even if you include the pedestal. Modi is purging non-native or non-Hindu cultural symbols with the zeal of a Black Lives Matter activist in a city full of Confederate statues. He has started with Delhi's streets: Rajpath, with its reference to British colonial rule, has been renamed Kartavya Path. Aurangzeb Road, named after the Muslim emperor who ruled Moghul India three and a half centuries ago, has a new (albeit still Muslim) eponym—Abdul Kalam, the late rocket scientist and Indian president. The English hymn "Abide with Me," beloved of Gandhi and traditionally performed by a military band on India's annual Republic Day, was axed from the program last year.

Although the BJP's Hindu ideology is not necessarily radical, the voters' *democratic* mood can be very radical indeed. That the BJP is in power in the first place means that the old "managed" democracy of the Congress party system has been replaced with a more freewheeling variant—a more democratic democracy, if you will, a democracy that answers not to "values" but to the society as it actually exists. That society is multicultural and multi-religious, yes, but it is also gossippy, hot-tempered, and among the most pious societies on earth. Eighty percent of people pray once a day, according to a survey by the Pew Center on Religion.

Mathematical Considerations

In a multicultural democracy, any community's loss of clout, often through relative demographic decline, will be taken as a threat to its way of life. Democracy then quite naturally takes

on a military cast, or at best a diplomatic one. Like a number of parties holding power in divided democracies—like Fidesz in Hungary offering citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in eastern Europe, or like the Democratic Party slackening immigration controls in the United States—the BJP connives at improving its demographic position. It has passed a Citizenship Amendment Act, which privileges Hindu refugees over others. In the state of Karnataka, the high court is deciding whether a Muslim couple can legally adopt a Hindu woman's child. Such arguments escalated in intensity last May, when Shraddha Walkar, a 27-year-old Hindu woman, was murdered by her Muslim boyfriend Aaftab Poonawalla, who chopped her body into 35 pieces and scattered it in the woods. Modi's supporters often describe such episodes as "love jihad." The newspapers have been full of it.

Misgivings about conversion of any kind, under any circumstances, are a perennial feature of Indian life. Nine states have anti-conversion laws. BJP-sympathetic Indians are adamant that the original meaning of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, concerning freedom of religion, does not include a freedom to convert. Christianity can be held in suspicion. An Australian missionary, Graham Staines, was set on fire with his two sons in Orissa in 1999. But overwhelmingly, it is Islam that most engages the passions of BJP members. The country is only 2% Christian, after all, and 14% Muslim. Islam, moreover, was at the root of India's bloody partition from Pakistan in the last century, and today's Indians worry about Islamist movements as much as Westerners do. Most Muslims in India are descendants of those converted during the Moghul conquests from the 16th century onward. In Punjab, in the two generations before independence, the Hindu population dropped from 44% of the population to 29%, due to conversions to Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity. And in 1981 the entire Tam-

il Nadu town of Meenakshipuram, hundreds strong, converted to Islam. The rise of a more popular democracy has dramatically exacerbated worries on this front.

The Meenakshipuram case involves an important element of BJP rule—the element of caste. The hundreds who converted to Islam there were untouchables. The option of conversion, broadly understood, is precisely what democracy and freedom of association are supposed to place before citizens, albeit in a more individual way. After two generations, this logic has become apparent to Indians outside of elites. They are growing more obstreperous because they are growing freer. But once you have a marketplace of cultures and especially faiths, the Hindu world is at risk of getting deserted by its subordinate members. This would be the movement's Achilles heel if its leaders were not careful. As British historian Perry Anderson has noted in *The Indian Ideology* (2012), Gandhi understood that in a democracy there are "mathematical" considerations requiring the Hindu side to seek the votes of lower castes. Savarkar himself saw that, if India were to be a real democracy, then the writing would be on the wall for the old caste system. The BJP is not stupid: the currency in which people expect to be compensated for their votes is equality.

Because Hindu radicalism in the 20th century was the province of nostalgic Brahmins, many analysts have assumed the BJP was a party of upper-caste elites. We now know better. Of the 303 BJP members in the Parliament's lower house now, 63% belong either to scheduled castes and tribes, or to the group of Other Backward Castes that includes Modi's. As the political scientist Nalin Mehta has argued in his indispensable recent work, *The New BJP: Modi and the Making of the World's Largest Political Party* (2022), this caste revolution is an undiscussed key to the BJP's rise. The party can wage its campaign to unravel the special constitutional rights

of Muslims only because it has the backing of voters who want the social revolution it is waging on behalf of Hindus of lower caste.

The BJP revolution is a democratic uprising taking place under idiosyncratic conditions. It is both more innocent and more dangerous than it looks. It happened because India's government for too long took no account of its majority's ethnic identity. Hindu grievances were delegitimized as bigotry, and left to fester until Hindu politicians and activists laid hold of powerful symbols like Ayodhya, and an important part of the majority began to vote like minorities. By then it was too late for the Congress party and other Indian elites to talk them back into the hold.

The problem of respecting the decisions of majorities while defending the rights of minorities is an anthropological one, not a moral one. We like to pretend that, when it comes to balancing majority and minority interests, there is a knowable "right thing to do." Often there isn't. We also like to pretend that protecting minorities always means protecting them against abuse and persecution by majorities. Sometimes it does. But just as often it means claiming prerogatives for minorities against the innocent preferences of democratic majorities. When progressive change is about protecting minorities from majorities, it can become not just undemocratic but anti-democratic. It may be *for* the people, but it will not be *of* the people or *by* the people. Eventually it draws the people directly into the political fight, to unpredictable effect.

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Book Review by Helen Andrews

Look Back in Anger

The Inheritors: An Intimate Portrait of South Africa's Racial Reckoning, by Eve Fairbanks. Simon & Schuster, 416 pages, $27.99 (cloth), $19.99 (paper)

Eve Fairbanks's study of South Africa, *The Inheritors*, opens with Malaika, an African girl who lives in Soweto, getting up before dawn for the two-hour bus ride to the formerly all-white school where her mother has enrolled her. Apartheid has been over for more than a decade by this point, but still the skyline shows a visible difference between black Soweto and white Johannesburg. In Malaika's shack, the power doesn't always work and the

walls are corrugated iron. Looking out the window of the bus, she can see white neighborhoods running out to the horizon "until the lights got so dense and bright that they mimicked a sunrise." That is the motif of Malaika's life: the feeling that the perks of white society are close enough for her to see but still withheld from her.

When F.W. de Klerk handed power over to Nelson Mandela in 1994, everyone hoped South Africa would continue to function as smoothly as before, just with different people in charge, as if de Klerk had handed Mandela the keys to his car. Fairbanks uses the car metaphor to explain her theory for why things didn't work out that way: "De Klerk managed to sell a used car on the verge of a breakdown to a family that only realized, when they got in to drive it, that it was a lemon."

In fact, the car was not about to break down. South Africa was better situated than any other post-colonial nation in Africa to achieve stability and prosperity. It had abundant natural resources, a thriving manufacturing sector, and the continent's best university system. What really went wrong was this: it took European civilization centuries to get from dirt-floor shacks to working light switches. Behind those advances stood revolutions in science, industry, religion, and social interaction. Those cultural prerequisites were invisible to Malaika as she gazed out the bus window at the lights of Johannesburg, but they turned out to be essential.

Fairbanks is a former political writer for *The New Republic* who has lived in South Africa for more than a decade. *The Inheritors* is her first book, a work of literary nonfiction that follows a handful of real individuals as if they were characters in a novel, telling their life stories and inner thoughts to illustrate the broader story of their nation, similar to George Packer's *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* (2013). The three

main subjects are Malaika, a "born-free"—that is, one born after apartheid—who later goes to university and becomes a writer; her mother, Dipuo, a former anti-apartheid activist with the African National Congress (ANC); and Christo, a white Afrikaner who was drafted from the family farm to serve in the apartheid-era military and now works as a lawyer in Bloemfontein.

"Activist" is a mild word for what Dipuo did in the freedom struggle. A better word would be "terrorist." She tells Fairbanks about a grocery store in Soweto whose owner she thought was a police informer, so she burned down the building. She pulled another suspected spy from her bed and helped stone the woman to death on her front lawn. Both the grocery store owner and the woman later turned out to be innocent. "When I asked her whether she ever participated in a necklacing"—the brutal form of punishment used by the ANC where the victim is doused in gasoline and a burning tire placed over his head—"she just looked down and was silent," writes Fairbanks. Dipuo's *nom de guerre* in the ANC was "Stalin."

Christo has equal claim to a heritage of resistance, odd as it may be to think of the Afrikaners that way. Family lore tells of a time in the 19th century when "an imperious colonial bureaucrat tried to collect a toll from his ancestor at a bridge," and his great-great-great-grandfather "harnessed an ox to the tollgate's pillar, whipped it forward, and ripped the tollgate out of its foundations." The Boers, South Africa's Dutch settlers, were once the darlings of the global Left for their resistance to the British Empire. The Boer War (1899–1902) pitted 400,000 imperial forces against approximately 88,000 Boer guerrillas, and the British were humbled if not defeated. The British then subjected the Afrikaners to a campaign of forced assimilation to make them learn English and accept the crown, to no avail.

This resistance was all the more remarkable because on paper the Afrikaners had very little going for them. They were culturally backward compared to English-speaking South Africans, less urbanized, and poorer. Before the Afrikaner-dominated National Party (N.P.) came to power in 1948, the average Afrikaans-speaker's income was less than half of an English-speaker's; in 1970, after decades of N.P. rule, it had only surpassed two thirds. They made up for their lack of economic power with remarkable group cohesion and stern Calvinist faith.

These qualities are embodied in the tradition of *vasbyt*, which Christo explains to Fairbanks in detail. Literally the term means "bite hard and hold on," but it can also be used as an exhortation: "Don't quit!" In Christo's case, it referred to an army rite of passage in which recruits hiked for three days over murderous terrain with all their gear on their backs. Christo loved it. Later, after apartheid ended, he was appointed residential master of a dormitory at his alma mater, the University of the Free State, for Afrikaner students who were having trouble adjusting to a campus in the process of becoming 70% black. He instituted old army traditions like morning inspections, push-ups, and *vasbyt*. He took the boys out to a farm where he had built an obstacle course, with a barbecue for everyone at the end. His strict paternal style earned him the boys' loyalty. "We all would have gone to war for him," one tells Fairbanks.

It is an interesting question which of the two is more racist, Christo or Dipuo. If we take the modern definition of racism as about upholding systems of oppression rather than personal bias, then it would be Christo. On the other hand, Christo feels guilty during his military service that life in a front-line town is "making me racist." He sees so much gratuitous savagery and indifference to human life, like a corpse with brains scattered around it and

black children playing indifferently next to it, that he has to resist the thought that "it is only animals who do this kind of thing." Whereas Dipuo proudly tells Fairbanks, "I hated whites." Under apartheid, "I would have killed any white person if I had seen one. They deserved to die."

Whatever hate Dipuo felt, her daughter Malaika feels more. In her book, *Memoirs of a Born Free*, published under the name Malaika wa Azania ("Malaika of South Africa") in 2014, she writes that "the unfortunate 'privilege' of attending multiracial former Model-C schools" merely condemned her to "daily living in the boiling fire of white supremacy." She insists that the country is "still trapped in the clutches of white racism" and claims that apartheid will only truly end with the overthrow of capitalism.

Malaika's feelings should not be taken as representative of the average South African. Her education and her political activism put her in a tiny minority. Her sense of disillusionment, however, is widespread. For many citizens—the unemployed, crime victims, those with AIDS—freedom has not worked out the way they expected.

What fascinates Fairbanks most is the disillusionment of white liberals, which she presents as the result not of things going badly but of things going well. "Many white South Africans told me that black forgiveness felt like a slap in the face," she writes. They could not forgive being forgiven. They were haunted by feelings of irrelevance, such a letdown after the thrill of participating in the liberation struggle. She tells of a progressive politician who forged what he thought was a deep friendship with Thabo Mbeki (who would eventually serve as president after Mandela) when the ANC leadership were living in exile. After coming to power, Mbeki never

spoke to him again. He no longer had any use for him. This man fell into a depression and drank himself to death.

It is an interesting phenomenon. At the same time, no one would say that liberal malaise is the most pressing problem facing South Africa. South Africa has come full circle: Under apartheid, electricity was unreliable in black townships; after 30 years of ANC rule, electricity is unreliable everywhere. Middle-class homes own gas generators as a matter of course in case of sudden outages. Even mineral and metal mines, the powerhouses of the economy, cannot count on a steady supply of power, which is one reason why AngloGold Ashanti, a successor company of Anglo American, closed its last remaining gold-mining operations in South Africa in 2020, the end of a streak dating back to Ernest Oppenheimer's founding the company in 1917.

Every suburban home is equipped with fortress-like gates and electric fences to prevent break-ins and push-in robberies, as well as with neighborhood private security to substitute for the ineffectual police. Trucks are robbed on the highway so frequently that the port of Durban is losing business to Mozambique, where the roads are safer. Railroad companies find it impossible to maintain service on lines where vandals have ripped up the tracks to sell for scrap. Food imports keep rising as the country becomes less and less able to feed itself due to misguided agricultural policy, aimed more at redistributing land to favored constituents than to producing crops.

Fairbanks believes that much of this supposed deterioration exists only in the minds of whites. When she is robbed at gunpoint by a gang of young black men and for weeks feels anxiety walking down the street, she goes to "two white therapists," she explains, because "I worried my reaction was irrational and ra-

cially biased." Ordinary South Africans don't have the luxury of interrogating so scrupulously their responses to criminality. They just have to navigate their way through increasingly Third-World conditions. Although Fairbanks is not a tourist, having lived in South Africa for more than a decade, she never had to raise a child or operate a business there. Those activities would have made it harder for her to believe that crumbling infrastructure was all in the mind.

How did things get so bad? One answer is: little by little. On her way to school, Malaika passes through a formerly white neighborhood of granite apartment buildings. Over the years she watches as "the buildings fell into disrepair. Trash fluttered everywhere and threadbare undergarments hung off the balconies like SOS flags." In an adjacent neighborhood of single-family homes, the few remaining white residents frequently call the police on their black neighbors for hosting loud all-night parties in violation of noise ordinances. This is racist, according to Malaika, because they don't do the same when white men mow their lawns at 7 a.m. on a Sunday.

A poignant side character in the book is Michael Buys, a man of mixed race who after apartheid got a job in land reform. The government bought white-owned farms, and it was Michael's job to give them away to black applicants. "I loved the idea of giving land back, even of *taking* it back," he says. He grew disillusioned as he saw sophisticated farms with tractors, irrigation systems, and contracts in the global commodity marketplace handed over to illiterate subsistence farmers. His bosses insisted he carry on regardless. "Why do you ask all these questions?" they said if he grilled a new applicant about his qualifications. "You don't think he'll be able to do what the white people did?"

Fairbanks finds one of the beneficiaries of Michael's program, who was given a fruit plantation. She discovers that "he never figured out how to make it generate revenue and was now practically starving." The lychee and mango trees are still there, but "whatever fruit they produced was left on the tree to be gnawed by monkeys. Most of the buildings—sheds, farmhouses, packhouses for drying fruit—had collapsed and been stripped by vandals of their roofing and electric wiring."

"We blacks saw businesses we thought had no challenges," a failing farmer tells her. "But we were lying to ourselves." There you have it in a nutshell. Black South Africans thought their white neighbors were rich because of the things they had. As it turned out, nice things didn't stay nice for very long without the codes of behavior that kept them nice. Being a white South African looked very easy from the outside, but it turned out to depend on lots of little habits that, even with the best will in the world, would have been hard to explain in advance. (Why *is* getting up early to mow your lawn a better quality in a neighbor than staying up late at a party?)

Nowhere is this gulf more evident than in South Africa's political leadership. Whatever you want to say about the old National Party, they were not personally corrupt. Prime Minister J.G. Strijdom used to refund to the government every month the stamps he had used in personal correspondence. The ANC, on the other hand, has presided over a frenzy of personal enrichment. The current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has a stated net worth in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and this is likely an underestimate, considering that some lucky burglars who happened to strike his personal farm in 2020 made off with $4 million cash in foreign currency. Punishment for corruption is rare. Former president Jacob Zuma is unusual in having been prosecuted for, and convicted

of, money laundering. During his trial, he protested that corruption is only a crime "in a Western paradigm."

Would better leaders have saved South Africa? This is a standard argument: Mandela was a great man, then Thabo Mbeki and his successors screwed it up. The assumption is that if we could find another leader as good as Mandela, everything would be fine. This is unlikely. Consider Eskom, the embattled utility unable to provide reliable power. What could a new Mandela do about rampant theft from the company's warehouses, where valuable replacement parts are often found stripped of their copper and left useless? Or about the refusal of many customers (including the vast majority of Sowetans) to pay their bills? In 1984, when the apartheid government tried to make one neighborhood of delinquent customers pay higher electricity bills, the resulting riot led to three local officials being hacked to death and their bodies burned in the street.

Those who concede that South Africa has gone downhill since 1994 often blame the "legacy of apartheid." When Malaika's uncle Godfrey is shot by security guards during an attempted robbery of a shopping mall, she reflects that young men like Godfrey turn to crime only because they were denied other opportunities under apartheid. Looking at the persistence of dysfunction in each passing generation of born-frees, the legacy of apartheid gets ever less credible as an explanation.

Could the decline of South Africa have been avoided? Escaping worst-case scenarios is the country's special gift. Pessimists predicted in 1994 that the country would collapse into civil war. Thanks to Mandela's leadership and healing gestures like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this outcome was avoided. Perhaps wiser preparation could have forestalled the country's other problems.

It is unlikely that the country would be better off if the National Party had simply handed power over to the ANC sooner. Apartheid ended, ultimately, because the Berlin Wall fell. The ANC was subsidized by Moscow and controlled by members of the South African Communist Party. (This used to be controversial but by now everyone has admitted it.) If the ANC had come to power sooner, it would have been a disaster geopolitically, with South Africa's vast mineral wealth propping up the Soviet bloc for many more decades, maybe indefinitely. Domestically, it would have led to a Communist tyranny run by true-believing Stalinists.

Between the two extremes of apartheid and Communism, surely some democratic middle ground can be imagined, one that would have better prepared the country to fulfill the promise of the Rainbow Nation (as post-apartheid South Africa was dubbed). Ideally, it would have been something that gave black South Africans as much political power as possible without risking a switch of Cold War sides. It would have cultivated a class of black politicians and bureaucrats with experience in responsible government, and if possible, a black professional class and commercial class, too.

This middle ground is very similar to the apartheid-era policy of self-governing "homelands," which were territories within the borders of South Africa, some as large as Belgium, that operated as independent black states with their own leaders, constitutions, parliaments, and domestic policies. Critics dismissed these territories as "Bantustans," and Fairbanks too calls them "always a farce" and their leaders "puppet rulers." This is a relic of propaganda from a period when the global Left was required for political reasons to deny that anything about apartheid was successful or well-intentioned. Prince Buthelezi, leader of the homeland

KwaZulu, ranked first in a 1977 poll of urban Africans asked their most admired figure, ahead of Nelson Mandela. Buthelezi's attitude to the apartheid government was essentially the same as Mandela's to the Soviets: who's to say whether they are using us or we are using them, as long as my people are benefiting from the arrangement?

The homelands were heavily subsidized by the national government. In 1983, 9% of the federal budget was spent on the homelands. They were nevertheless independent in their domestic affairs, in theory and to a large extent in fact. The Sun City casino, where musicians famously vowed in a 1985 protest song they would not play, was able to operate in the homeland of Bophuthatswana because gambling was legal there, as it was not in white territory. The University of Bophuthatswana, known as "Unibop," hired radical white professors who had been blackballed in the rest of South Africa. It had its own television station, Bop TV, and its own airline, Bop Air.

It is a core claim of the present ANC government that apartheid deliberately obstructed the economic development of black communities. There is a quote from Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, that was repeated by literally every tour guide I encountered on my first visit to South Africa: "There is no place for him [the African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor." None of them gave the second half of the quote: "Within his own community, however, all doors are open." Verwoerd did not just rhetorically support black education. He presided over its massive expansion as Native Affairs minister (4% of black children aged 7 to 16 were in school in 1938, 41% in 1953) and prime minister. He funded universities in the homelands, over reactionary objections, because "we shall have to negotiate frequently with them in the future over many issues, in-

cluding education and politics. It will be better to negotiate with people who are well informed and educated."

Fairbanks echoes the line that apartheid intentionally retarded black development. In her discussion of farm redistribution, she writes, "Of course many land reform beneficiaries were underskilled. That was what the apartheid regime intended." Quite the opposite. Demonstration projects were held year after year by idealistic government officials to teach homeland farmers modern methods to make them more skilled and productive. It was a source of immense frustration in Pretoria that they remained stubbornly attached to their old ways, which led to soil erosion and overgrazing. Homeland agriculture produced less than a fifth of what it could have. Contrary to modern clichés, much of the land was of high quality and well-watered.

The government put equal effort into cultivating black entrepreneurs. Fairbanks meets the son of one of them, whose father owned a chain of grocery stores in one of the homelands. "He was the first one to bring serious money back to his village," the young man boasts. The Bantu Investment Corporation had a lavish budget and a mission to bring private sector jobs to black areas. It had many successes, mainly in light manufacturing—furniture, textiles, matches—as well as garage owners, butchers, shopkeepers, building contractors, and other small businessmen. The main problem it faced was a shortage of entrepreneurs ready to submit business plans.

Incidentally, when apartheid restrictions on freedom of movement were lifted in the early 1990s, Fairbanks's friend's father lost all his customers overnight to the formerly white shopping mall nearby, and his stores closed within a year. This was a common fate. Obviously, the ANC today has its own policies aimed at building

up a black middle class. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) requires, among other things, that existing enterprises hire a certain number of black employees. Often this means stashing unqualified people with political connections in no-show or make-work positions. It would be interesting to compare the results of the two approaches. BEE beneficiaries live in nicer houses, but that may be all you can say for them.

The most recent edition of the standard textbook *South Africa: A Modern History* (2000) states that education under apartheid was based on an "assumption of an inferior potential in African minds" and was "explicitly designed to prepare blacks for an inferior place in society." According to the Afrikaner historian Herman Giliomee, these false claims are absent from the 1987 edition. The change, he observes, "is a reflection of the fact that a new government preoccupied with white racism had come to power." The brazenness of the falsehood is frankly puzzling. There is quite enough objectionable about apartheid that it is hard to understand why anyone would need to lie about it.

But they do. In 2018, the Johannesburg-based advertising firm TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris won a national award for its radio campaign titled "Past and Present" on behalf of the Apartheid Museum. It juxtaposed quotations from Verwoerd—"Blacks cannot rule themselves," "The black man is the symbol of racial inferiority and laziness"—with quotations from Donald Trump—"Laziness is a trait in blacks, it really is, I believe that"—and ended with a voiceover intoning: "There has never been a better time to learn from the mistakes of our past." It turned out that the Trump line was taken from an unreliable memoir by a former Trump employee and is probably made up. The agency was forced to return the award.

The Verwoerd quotes were equally made up. They were not even the kind of thing he might have said. The whole point of apartheid was that blacks *could* rule themselves, in their own homelands. One can read all 735 pages of Verwoerd's collected speeches and find not a single word about black inferiority. "Their culture means just as much to them as ours does to us; it is just different," he told colleagues. The only possible explanation for how no one, including the supposed experts at the Apartheid Museum, bothered to catch such an implausible fabrication is that the leaders of white South Africa have achieved the distinction of being "libel-proof," their reputations so bad that to slander them is impossible under the law.

Fairbanks believes that South Africa is "a story that illuminates what lies ahead of us." The 1994 handover compressed into the blink of an eye a transition that the United States is undergoing more slowly: the regime's old heroes "became losers who had labored for a collapsed and discredited cause," and "people of color took their places in the president's office, in Parliament, on the committees that write the school history books." The defining characteristic of white South Africans today is their lack of moral standing. They have been so discredited over apartheid that they have no basis for making claims in the public sphere. This lack of moral authority is more important than their being demographically outnumbered, a fate that is still a long way off for whites in the U.S. (but not unthinkable, as they've gone from 89% of the country to 58% in two generations). It should be obvious to everyone by now that this lack of moral standing is what Black Lives Matter and the 1619 Project have in mind for white Americans. They want to take the same moral certainty with which we condemn Jim Crow and extend it to everything white Americans have ever done

until, like white South Africans, we feel grateful just to have our continuing presence tolerated.

Segregation is the point of comparison that comes to mind when most Americans think of South Africa. Apartheid-era diplomats urged their American counterparts to think instead of Indian reservations, a closer analogue if our Native American population had been in the tens of millions instead of the low hundred thousands. A still better comparison than either is the southern border. Imagine if one day the international community decided that Latin Americans should be able to vote in U.S. elections, since our economy depends on their labor and their fates are affected by U.S. policies. The counterargument would have nothing to do with whether Latin Americans are good people or possess human rights. It would be that they outnumber us more than two to one and would, by sheer numbers, render native voters null overnight. That was Verwoerd's case for apartheid: strictly mathematical. As long as blacks were 80% of the population and voting as a solid racial bloc, it would be folly to put the two communities into one democracy.

The argument that borders are the moral equivalent of apartheid is not just theoretical; it is being made today. The quality of life we enjoy in America is the result of exclusion. Otherwise, entire favelas would pack up and move here. On what moral basis do we keep them out? Do the people of Latin America not deserve nice things? One might ask why they can't have nice things in their own country, but the answer would probably be that it is somehow our fault. Certainly it is not anything the Latin Americans are doing. That would imply that they are incapable of sustaining nice things, and that would be racist. Eventually the only reply to these liberal gotchas is to say that foreigners can't have our country because it's ours. That is precisely the kind of basic

moral claim that the current Left would like to deprive Americans of the authority to make.

A few white South Africans have picked themselves up off the dirt and decided to make a go of political participation under the new regime. Most have rallied to the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (D.A.). If democracy worked the way theorists assumed, the D.A. would be a soaring success. It is a center-left, colorblind party with an excellent record of good government at the state and local level. Its white politicians, such as Tony Leon, have impeccable anti-apartheid credentials. The contrast in competence with the ruling party is stark, admittedly not difficult considering the ANC can't keep the water running. Yet in the 2019 election, when the D.A. had a black party leader, it received 4% of the black vote. In no election since its founding has its share of the black vote escaped single digits.

White South Africans cannot look forward to a day when they are no longer blamed for everything that goes wrong in their country. As apartheid recedes into the past, its role as a political explanation grows. A 2018 national survey found that 77% of black South Africans said they had "never personally experienced racism directed against them." Still, every ANC politician blames lingering racial disparities on the legacy of racism. The white population of South Africa could shrink to five Afrikaners in a remote corner of Gauteng, and no doubt Malaika would still be harping on about "the boiling fire of white supremacy."

So white South Africans will never achieve any political power no matter how hard they try, and they will never cease to be blamed for the country's misfortunes. That is the very definition of a dead end. When people say America is becoming more like South Africa, they usually mean that California can't keep the lights on and

private security is a booming business for middle-class neighborhoods in Baltimore and Portland. That is all part of it, but the most South African thing about our politics is the current effort to push white Americans into that same position as permanently powerless scapegoats. It is bizarre that this is something Eve Fairbanks would welcome.

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Essay by Myron Magnet

The Antiracist Racket

And its mind-forg'd manacles.

Beyond its falsity, there is no current idea so destructive as the fiction that America is systemically racist. It harms black Americans by shrinking their horizons and stoking their resentment; it has fueled crime and disorder in our cities; and by replacing our national faith in the unique excellence of our self-governing republic with a sense of its pervasive injustice and oppression, it makes us more vulnerable in a dangerous world. Confidence that we have a civilization worth defending is vital to our future.

After all, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s succeeded. In what was the defining political experience of a genera-

tion, that movement turned the nation inside out in order to remedy the overt racism that then marred America's promise of civil equality. Two decades of sit-ins and marches, of sermons and voter registrations, yielded changes that fully opened political, educational, and employment opportunities to blacks, while society grew dramatically more welcoming. Just compare the advertisements or movies—or college alumni magazines—of the 1950s to today's to get a sense of the revolution in racial attitudes that occurred. Or consider the change in the percentage of Americans who tell pollsters they approve of interracial marriage—4% in 1958 versus 94% in 2021.

But as the number of Americans who remember the civil rights era dwindles, the harangues of Black Lives Matter and the critical race theorists have obscured that era's accomplishment. The Gallup Poll tracks this trend: in 2014, respondents' satisfaction with U.S. race relations reached a high of 55%, versus 35% dissatisfied, but it began dropping thereafter, in the wake of Eric Garner's death in July of that year. Only 28% expressed satisfaction in 2022.

Because what people believe affects their actions as much as their real circumstances do, the imaginary world these propagandists have conjured up—in which racial injustice pervades everything, racist insults wound blacks at every turn, racism closes off advancement and shuts out fellowship—really does constrict black opportunity by denying it exists. By and large, the civil rights pioneers assumed that, once their movement succeeded, black Americans would gear up to seize the new opportunity, especially through wider educational choices. But the schools and colleges that were to arm black Americans for success now teach systemic racism, infusing a strange mix of suspicious resentment, fatalistic victimology, and aggrieved entitlement that doesn't fuel

initiative but instead feeds a resentment or hostility that hinders advancement and poisons race relations again. The poet William Blake wrote strikingly of "mind-forg'd manacles"; for many black Americans, the schools rivet them on, and BLM reinforces the chains.

Self-Destructive Habits

Perhaps civil rights leaders were too optimistic in thinking that the mere opening of opportunity would ensure black success. As it turned out, the vast changes in wider cultural attitudes that were dissolving racism in the 1960s were also harming the worst-off blacks by removing the stigma from self-destructive habits that blacks had long shunned, notwithstanding the history of slavery. Going on welfare became no longer shameful but rather reparations for oppression, nor was not working a personal failing but instead the result of job discrimination. Society, by excluding, oppressing, and impoverishing the criminal, argued social critics in the '60s and '70s, was to blame for black crime, not the outlaw himself. Perhaps he was even a manly rebel against an unjust society, and to imprison him was only to redouble the victimization society inflicts on him. And as that era's whole culture was having its fling with sex and drugs, the stigma against drug use and unwed childbearing tottered.

These attitudes filtered down the social scale, with the tragic result of entrenching a black underclass in the urban ghettoes, held down by non-work, welfare dependence, drug use, dropping out of school, crime, and weak, single-parent families. Too many poorly educated single mothers proved ill-equipped to train children in the virtues and cognitive skills that make for success, or to discipline them in a way that didn't leave sons with the contempt

for women and for authority that is a main theme of today's rap music. In place of the work ethic and the deferral of gratification arose an inner-city culture of victimology, grievance, and opposition to a society blamed for failings that would otherwise seem personal.

With what dismay must Americans of all races view the consequences today! In 2018, seven out of ten black children were born out of wedlock, compared to 28% of white babies (and, in 1965, 24% of black babies). The rate of homicide offenses among blacks is eight times higher than among whites, and black men, 6% of the U.S. population, are 40% of the nation's cop killers, the FBI reports. Urban police departments pile up their own dismal statistics. In 2019, the 9% of Los Angelenos who are black committed 44% of their city's violent crime, while St. Louis blacks, just under half the population, committed most of that city's. The 23% of New Yorkers who are black accounted for 72% of the shootings and 63% of the murders in 2020, and black Chicagoans, less than a third of the population, committed 71% of the murders.

Troubling, too, is educational performance, with black pupils who test proficient in basic math skills dropping from 64% in 4th grade to 50% in 8th grade and 30% in 12th. In higher education, affirmative action's competition for qualified black students has filled colleges with blacks who have sharply lower high school grades and admissions test scores than their white classmates. Many flounder; many drop or flunk out.

Up until 2014, the majority of Americans focused on the real, if imperfect, progress that blacks have made, while they grew complacent about the extent of black failure. Whites and blacks alike flirted with ghetto culture, by now a quasi-autonomous subculture and the polar opposite of the smoothly sophisticated cultural style

of the aspirationally named Count Basie, Duke Ellington, or Nat King Cole of an earlier generation of black musicians. But Black Lives Matter paradoxically highlighted black failure, albeit shrouded in white guilt, while downplaying black success.

A clearsighted response from blacks and whites alike would have pointed to the reality of black progress and reiterated the need for more black self-development, since by now government has done all that it can do, and continued black progress rests in blacks' own hands. What happened instead was that the angry accusations of Black Lives Matter and its ilk led white America, out of real abhorrence of slavery and Jim Crow and a heartfelt wish to give black Americans every possible hand up, to dismantle the rules and standards that apply to everyone and that undergird the nation's stability and success. If blacks were falling short, it was the measurements that had to go.

Creating Victims

It started with law enforcement. All the moldy myths of the 1960s and '70s rose from the grave to haunt the present. The criminal was supposedly the real victim of our unjust social order, with the police its all-too-willing enforcers, itching to kill black men. Blacks are imprisoned disproportionally and too often for minor offenses—though of course the black imprisonment rate is lower than the black offending rate, and 62% of black prisoners are behind bars for violent crimes, compared to 48% of white prisoners, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. A mere 3.8% of state prison inmates are in for simple drug possession.

This time around, though, big-city prosecutors decriminalized crime as if that, rather than law enforcement, were their job. Forgotten was the fact that government's essential purpose is the pro-

tection of life and property, to which police, prosecutors, and prisons are key. Blue state legislatures heaped fuel on the bonfire of law enforcement, while local authorities emptied out the jails, because they housed, it was said, "too many" blacks. These authorities defunded the cops, forbade order-keeping policing, and changed the rules of engagement for officers, barring them from using ordinary force to subdue those resisting arrest. Little wonder that cops retired in droves.

As in the '60s, crime exploded. Nationally, murders shot up at the highest rate in history in 2020—by almost 30%—and they rose another 4% in 2021. In New York, shootings nearly doubled in 2020, and murders skyrocketed by 42%. The vast majority of Americans who think that black lives matter can only lament that over 95% of these slain New Yorkers were black or Hispanic, while 80% of Chicago's 2020 murder victims were black. As Jesse Jackson grieved in 1993, at the crest of the last great crime wave, when violent criminals also were disproportionately black, "There is nothing more painful to me…than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and…look around and see somebody white and feel relieved…. Just to think we can't walk down our own streets—how humiliating!" After a two-decade respite from fear of assault on the streets, inner-city residents in particular and urbanites in general are once more looking over their shoulders. This time around, with urban economies already battered by the pandemic, it remains to be seen how many cities won't ever recover thanks to crime, joining moribund Baltimore, Camden, and Detroit.

It may sound corny, but one great boon of the national crime drop that began in 1994 with a policing revolution in New York was a growing racial amity in public places. Once Jesse Jackson's contemporaries, both white and black, were freed of the fear of

crime, we could acknowledge one another in the streets, recognize the content of character, exchange the silent civilities of urban life—a civil rights movement dream come true. But it didn't last. Anxiety, suspicion, and resentment are back, and they feed one another.

There's something almost comic about the nostrums for dismantling an imaginary systemic racism that the "antiracism" racket promotes, as if one should burn down one's house to cure a termite infestation. Too many blacks aren't measuring up to educational standards? Since it's axiomatic that blacks can't be deficient, that can only mean that the standards are racist. Out they go! A Bill Gates-funded manual for public school math teachers, for example, urges the educators to sweep away the "white supremacy culture… in math classrooms," junking the fundamentally racist assumption that math is about "getting the right answer," which in turn leads to a toxic, factitious "meritocracy" of achievement and knowledge. Antiracist teachers must replace the notion that if pupils "fail it is their fault" with an understanding of "the systemic reasons students fail." And so on up the educational ladder, with selective high schools, colleges, and even law and medical schools scrapping their entrance exams.

But if not by merit, if not by demonstrated skill, perseverance, and accomplishment, how will we select our lawyers and doctors, our scientists and engineers, starting with their admission to professional school? Isn't competence, even excellence, the goal, if we prize economic prosperity, military might, and a healthy populace? More broadly, unless we want a caste society, with a small overclass of inventive and productive strivers creating the national wealth and driving progress, over against a *lumpen* mob, surely we want a culture that encourages every citizen to develop fully whatever potential excellence lies within him, a democratic culture of striving

that raises everyone up rather than one that keeps people down. That requires high standards, not lowered ones that come wrapped in an excuse not to try.

Racist Symphonies

As the civil rights movement unfolded, government, rather than marches and sit-ins, became its engine, and government action imposed costs that future historians may consider excessive or unnecessary. School desegregation was essential, for example, but was bitterly divisive busing to achieve racial balance required? Some government interference with private business was unavoidable—especially to keep providers of public accommodation from discriminating by race—but did judges and bureaucrats really need to command employers to make their workforces mirror the racial composition of the surrounding area? As a result, government crowded out civil society. Public schools came to look less like neighborhood institutions that provided education than centralized government establishments for producing racial equality—part of the reason the schools fail. Businesses were no longer simply private associations of free people pursuing their own goals. Instead, owners and managers came to look constantly over their shoulders, anxiously attuned to the directives of government masters, like the children of an unreasonably demanding parent.

The benefit of the civil rights movement was huge; many of the costs were, too. But with the movement's goals already realized, there is no justification for any more abridgements of liberty or erosion of what remains of civil society in the name of a spurious antiracism. New York City, for example, now wants to make it illegal for landlords to do criminal background checks on potential

tenants. The absurd rationale: incarceration is a proxy for race, so such checks are racist, redoubling the injustice that society has already inflicted by disproportionally jailing blacks—for offenses for which society is ultimately to blame anyway. In the balance, the liberty of the landlord to protect his property from damage, or of other tenants not to live next door to rapists or thugs, weighs as nothing.

In the light of antiracism, educational and cultural institutions have lost sight of their purpose, too, just as New York's city council has forgotten that government exists to protect liberty, safety, and property, and it becomes illegitimate if it fails to do so. Is a university's purpose to further knowledge or to promote diversity? In choosing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) commissar with no scholarly distinction as its next president, Harvard's board has answered that question, and answered it foolishly. Museums and orchestras have notoriously been abasing themselves to atone for the supposed historic racism of high Western culture, but perhaps none wallows so absurdly as the New York Philharmonic's program notes for a Christmas season performance of *The Messiah*, that most sublime of human achievements. From about 1710, the program tells us, composer George Frideric Handel owned shares in the South Sea Company and the Royal African Company, both of which traded in slaves. No matter that Handel probably got the shares by chance or that there were few joint-stock companies in which to invest in 1710. "Either way, he did profit from the slave trade," the program pontificates. "Today we must acknowledge that the music we cherish benefited from institutionalized racism, and ask ourselves how we can reconcile the joy of Handel's *Messiah* with this dark past." We would do better to hold this silliness in derision and laugh it to scorn.

Speaking Truth to Power

So ingrained has the antiracism racket become that undoing it will be no small task. Hordes of apparatchiks—parasitic diversity deans; DEI consultants; Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) "experts"—now have a vested interest in its spread. Ever since the Democratic Party, during the Kennedy Administration, found its mission in championing the civil rights movement, the party has needed classes of victims to justify the redistributionism and swollen federal power to promote "social justice" that are its heart and soul. Now that real racism is largely a memory, fake racism suits it fine, along with the proliferation of self-appointed faux-victim groups that, by analogy with blacks, supposedly require government's equalizing ministrations. So the ruling Biden Administration has been pumping up the chimera of systemic racism, and wildly infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the whole of government. Our adversaries are happy to lend a hand. Knowing that the morale of the citizenry is no less a key ingredient of military might than weapons and ammunition, as the Ukraine War once again demonstrates, the Russian and Chinese propaganda machines have been gleefully showering dollars on BLM and its avatars, cannily subverting the belief in America's national virtue that prompts citizens to support a war and soldiers to fight one effectively.

Compounding the difficulty of exorcising antiracism, so many have by now been indoctrinated in its quasi-religious dogmas, and an Inquisition has arisen to punish heresies by cancelation of the apostate's livelihood, that for many there's real risk in challenging its tenets. Therefore, the task falls especially to those who can speak the truth with relative impunity—those who work for think tanks or publications that aren't in thrall to the prevailing orthodoxy, and

those old enough to face the Great Cancelation, beside which all lesser ones pale. Those organizations should state their opposition to antiracism's lies officially and unmistakably.

It may feel like preaching to the choir, but the truth—in this case so stark that anyone willing to look clearly can see it—has its own power, and soon enough others will chime in and swell the chorus.

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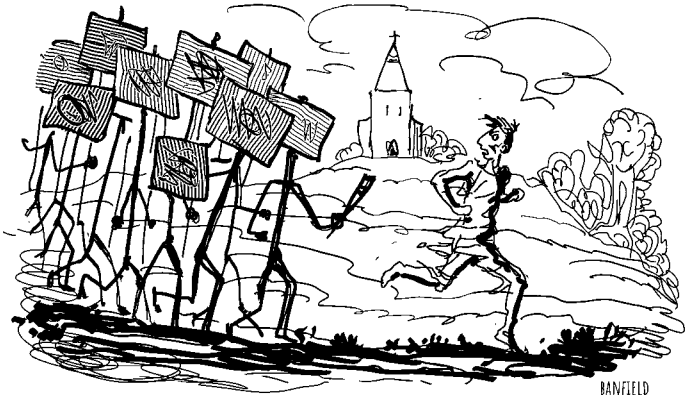


Book Review by Robert R. Reilly

Made in God's Image

All One in Christ: A Catholic Critique of Racism and Critical Race Theory, by Edward Feser. Ignatius Press, 163 pages, $17.95

Critical race theory is so intellectually empty that it might not seem worth criticizing. But "CRT"—the fashionable new code of dogmas, slogans, and political demands regarding race—should not be underestimated. It has infiltrated almost every institution of learning, the media, government, the corporate world, and even the military. It is now close to a mandatory doctrine. So, Edward Feser's *All One in Christ: A Catholic Critique of Racism and Critical Race Theory* is an important rejoinder, delivered in an accessible way for a wide audience, not just specialists and Catholics.

Though the body of the book is concerned with refuting CRT's major premises, the opening and closing chapters delineate the Catholic Church's teaching against racism. Feser contrasts the racial tribalism of CRT with the expansive and ennobling anthropology of Christianity throughout its many centuries of existence. Drawing on papal encyclicals and Scholastic philosophy, Feser demonstrates that CRT's regressive approach to race is most fully and consistently answered by the teaching and traditions of the Church.

This is doubly important because the relevant contributions of the Church, in both word and deed, have often been ignored, mischaracterized, or at least played down in today's debates on racism and its history. This not only undermines the reputation and position of the Church, but worse, it shuts off its unique and important contributions from the current discourse.

The heart of Feser's book, however, explains and then demolishes Critical Race Theory on a logical and philosophical basis. His own competence is in the field of philosophy, to which he has contributed several notable books from his post as a professor at Pasadena City College. In his chapter on "Philosophical Problems with Critical Race Theory," he exposes the myriad logical fallacies in CRT's central arguments. He takes no prisoners.

For those who have not paid attention to the pronouncements of CRT's academic exponents, Feser's chapter on "What Is Critical Race Theory?" is eye-opening. On the evidence he presents, CRT seems to be little more than a giant tautology. If asked to prove that something or someone is racist, the rejoinder is that the question itself is racist. If you claim not to be racist, that proves your "implicit bias" toward racism. Colorblind laws are not non-racist, but actually racist. Pointing out the tautological nature of the argument is a "micro-" or maybe even a "macro-aggression." Feser writes

that "CRT claims that racism permeates every aspect of human life, even into the unconscious motivations and seemingly innocent actions of individuals who suppose themselves not to be racist. It claims that any resistance to this CRT analysis is itself a manifestation of this omnipresent racism." And round and round we go.

This is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's denigration of classical Greek philosophy as a façade behind which lurked the will to power, to which all things are reducible. Similarly, CRT holds that being against racism is a façade. Whites are not trying to understand or assist blacks and other people of color but to dominate them. This Nietzschean point of view makes the truth unavailable by any means and reduces the search for it to another form of political struggle—which is what CRT is. After all, Feser asks, "Why not say the same of Critical Race Theory itself? Why not regard it as merely another mask for the 'will to power,' worn by those who envy and resent whites—and thus as having no more objective validity or claim to truth than the views CRT criticizes?"

CRT's only answer to this question is: because you are white, and white people are racist. Feser cites CRT thinker Robin DiAngelo's view that "a positive white identity is an impossible goal" for "white identity is inherently racist [and] white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy." In fact, "racism…pervades every vestige of our reality." Isn't this the obverse of what white racists thought of black people? Is the solution to racism to reverse the roles and have black people think this way of white people? Yes, says Ibram X. Kendi in *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019): "The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination."

Feser rightly points out that there is essentially no difference between CRT ideology and Communist or Nazi ideology. Simply substitute race for class and it works pretty much the same way. As Feser says, it also has a Maoist flavor. Kendi calls for "constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination…a radical reorientation of our consciousness." This is clearly redolent of Maoist ideological struggle sessions held to produce confessions and total thought conformity. Can something like President Xi's social credit score be far behind?

In a line reminiscent of the French Revolution's formula "no enemies to the left," Kendi proclaims that "we cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic." As President Joe Biden proclaimed, "[R]acism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia—they're all connected." This package deal increases the pool of support for CRT. As confirmation that CRT indoctrination works, Feser cites political scientist Eric Kaufmann's evidence "that the percentage of white liberals who regarded racism as a serious problem went from under 40 percent in 2014 to over 80 percent in 2017."

Of course, since CRT is a racist ideology, it comes closest to Nazism. Like Nazi theory, CRT holds that race is the engine and key to history, and similarly its aim is power. Feser writes, "If you substitute 'white people' for 'Jews' and 'people of color' for 'Germans,' the resemblance is eerie." In fact, "it would be difficult to distinguish Critical Race Theory literature from the ugly propaganda of Nazism. Its claims are comparably extreme, even if it has not (yet?) led to comparable levels of violence. It also has manifestly totalitarian implications." Indeed, if moral character is determined by color, if conduct is caused by forces outside of people's control, then, logically, they must be controlled by others. Voilà, a totalitarian state is on its way. Are the CRT people unaware of the highly unattractive provenance of their ideas?

Feser says that Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, coauthors of *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018), point out that "seeing the world through the lenses of such CRT concepts can actually do serious damage to mental health." Indeed, the more indoctrinated in the ideology, the greater the decline in the ability to recognize reality. Feser does not mention the 1619 Project, but it is a good example of CRT blindness. As a grievance-based ideology, CRT is bereft of the moral realism that enables one to see things as they are. It prefers furious unknowing.

Even though his philosophical arguments stand solidly on their own ground, Feser's framing chapters on Christian teaching supply something of profound significance that, if allowed to become part of the public discourse, might contribute mightily to it. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed, "It was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal." In other words, Christianity is the most powerful antidote to racism. In the first chapter, Feser supplies the passage from Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, from which the book takes its title: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:26-28). A range of papal citations then demonstrates how this scriptural principle has been reaffirmed and defended throughout the Church's long history. In 1937, Pope Pius XI enraged Adolf Hitler with the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Anxiety), which he pointedly wrote in German, not Latin: "Whoever exalts race, or the people...divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God." Feser also quotes from the extraordinary 1537 papal bull, *Sublimis Deus* (The Sublime God), in which Pope Paul III condemned the

enslavement of West Indian and South American natives. Paul attributed that evil, "unheard of before now," to "the enemy of the human race," Satan. "Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property," wrote the pope: they should "freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possessions of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved." In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI closed *In Supremo Apostolatus* ("Endowed with the Highest Apostolic Authority") by prohibiting "any Ecclesiastic or lay person from presuming to defend as permissible this trade in Blacks under no matter what pretext or excuse."

Supporting this view were some of the great Scholastic theologians of the day. The Thomist thinker Francisco de Vitoria insisted that Indians had a right to their property and to their own rulers. The cleric Bartolomé de Las Casas, after he became bishop of Chiapas in modern-day Mexico, forbade absolution to those who subjected the Indians to forced labor. Somewhat later, in the 16th century, Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez held that "in the nature of things all men are born free." Well before Thomas Jefferson, Suárez's Italian contemporary Robert Cardinal Bellarmine said that "all men are born naturally free and equal." And in 1839, Pope Gregory XVI ordered that "no one in the future dare to bother unjustly, despoil of their possessions, or reduce to slavery…Blacks."

In addition to the many valuable quotations and citations that Feser supplies, I would add one of the most remarkable and perhaps the earliest. In the 4th century A.D., Saint Gregory of Nyssa delivered a homily on Ecclesiastes which is worth quoting at length for its extraordinary rhetoric and also, of course, for its substance. Reflecting on the buying and selling of slaves, Saint Gregory asked:

> For what price, tell me? What did you find in existence worth as much as this human nature? What price did you put on rationality?... God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness. If he is in the likeness of God, and...has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller? To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts...are irrevocable. God himself would not reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, recalled us to freedom.... Your origin is from the same ancestors, your life is of the same kind, sufferings of soul and body prevail alike over you who own him and over the one who is subject to your ownership—pains and pleasures, merriment and distress, sorrows and delights, rages and terrors, sickness and death. Is there any difference in these things between the slave and his owner? Do they not draw in the same air as they breathe? Do they not see the sun in the same way?... If you are equal in all these ways, therefore, in what respect, have you something extra, tell me, that you who are human think yourself the master of a human being and say, "I bought male and female slaves," like herds of goats or pigs.

Shortly thereafter, in the early 5th century A.D., Saint Augustine taught that God "did not wish the rational being, made in his own image, to have dominion over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over the beasts."

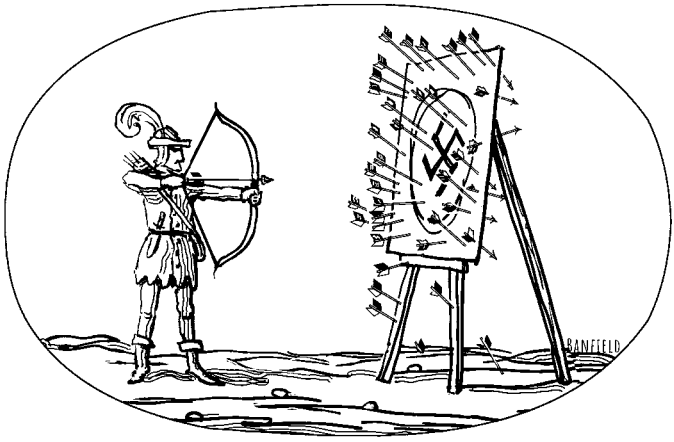
Today, Feser argues, the Church proclaims the same gospel against the new racism of Critical Race Theory. Consistent with all prior teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that "any theory or form whatsoever of…racial discrimina-

tion is morally unacceptable." Feser's philosophical orientation is Thomist, and this book's use of both reason and revelation against CRT is, in a way, a demonstration of the power of Aquinas's reconciliation of faith and reason. CRT receives it from both barrels.

Signs of hope have already begun to appear. A new Florida law proscribes any curriculum designed to "indoctrinate" students into thinking any person "is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously, solely by virtue of his or her race or sex" or that any person "by virtue of his or her race or sex" bears responsibility for "actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex."

This book deserves a wide audience. Its powerful arguments will empower the reader to confront CRT insanity, help roll it back, and prevent its further advances. We are, after all, "All One," which is what made our republic possible. A successful CRT assault on this truth would make it impossible. Those are the stakes.

Robert R. Reilly is the author, most recently, of America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding *(Ignatius Press).*



Essay by Leonard Sax

We're Teaching the Holocaust All Wrong

A problem of human nature.

My late mother, Dr. Janet Sax, was a student of German literature who minored in German at the University of Michigan. I can still recall her reciting Goethe's haunting poem *Der Erlkönig*, in which a dying boy hallucinates an elf-king who threatens to kill him. I knew by heart the lyrics to the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony before I was ten years old: *Seid umschlungen, Millionen! Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!* Millions, be you embraced! This kiss for all the world!

Books mentioned in this essay:

Irena's Children: The Extraordinary Story of the Woman Who Saved 2,500 Children from the Warsaw Ghetto, by Tilar J. Mazzeo. Gallery Books, 352 pages, $18.99 (paper)

Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered, by Ruth Klüger. The Feminist Press, 216 pages, $15.95 (paper)

Account Rendered: A Dossier of My Former Self, by Melita Maschmann. Plunkett Lake Press, 294 pages, $16.95 (paper)

There was something ironic about her Germanophilia because my mother, born in 1924, defined her Jewish identity in ethnic, not religious, terms. And that meant an identity steeped in the Holocaust and the horrors of Nazi Germany. She grew up in Toledo, Ohio, with neighbors who listened to Father Charles Coughlin praising Adolf Hitler on the "radio priest's" nationwide broadcasts. I would ask my mother how, given the crimes of Nazi Germany, could she read and enjoy German poetry? Knowing my love of classical music, which she had instilled in me, she answered:

> Bach. Beethoven. Brahms. Haydn. Mozart. Schubert. Schumann. Mendelssohn. Wagner. Mahler. Bruckner. All of them spoke German as their first language. Most of the greatest music in the Western tradition was written by Germans. Beethoven is not responsible for the Holocaust. Neither is Goethe or Schiller.

But that raised a question that I still wrestle with 50 years later: how could the same culture that gave rise to Beethoven and Brahms, Goethe and Schiller, also have given rise to Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler, Auschwitz and Treblinka? Before he became the Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels earned a doctorate in German literature—under the tutelage of a Jewish professor, Max Freiherr von Waldberg.

Good Guys and Bad Guys

Two years ago, when my daughter was in 8th grade, she was assigned to read *Irena's Children* (2016), the story of Irena Sendler, who rescued more than 2,000 Jewish children in Poland during World War II. Sendler was captured and tortured as the Gestapo tried to force her to reveal the names of her collaborators. She never yielded a single name, despite the Gestapo breaking both her legs.

As I read the book along with my daughter, and discussed it with her, I began to wonder. I think that she, like most teens, may take the wrong lessons from such a book. Over the past 22 years, I have visited more than 460 schools in my role as an educational consultant—not only in the United States but also in Australia, Canada, England, Mexico, New Zealand, and Scotland. For many middle- and high-school students, their knowledge of the Holocaust comes from accounts in which the Jews are victims, the Germans are evil, and the heroes are brave. These stories are often deeply moving. But the lines are clearly drawn, whether in classics such as Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956) or in more contemporary books such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980).

To be sure, I have observed substantial variations among schools in their approach to the Holocaust. Jewish schools are more likely

to place the Holocaust in historical context by reviewing the long history of European anti-Semitism, including medieval Jewish ghettos, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and the Russian pogroms of the 1800s and early 1900s—sometimes including a gratuitous showing of *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), which students at Jewish schools have already seen too many times. The Jewish schools also are more likely to complete the unit with an exploration of the role played by Holocaust survivors in launching the state of Israel. Schools with a Protestant or Catholic affiliation typically portray the Holocaust as a manifestation of pure evil, putting Adolf Hitler alongside mass murderers and serial killers. Schools without a religious affiliation, both public and private, commonly present anti-Semitism as one kind of prejudice, and sometimes set the Holocaust alongside the genocide of Native Americans and the treatment of African-American slaves in the South before the Civil War. Twenty U.S. states now require the Holocaust to be taught in schools. In some schools, it's painfully clear that the teachers are assigning Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947) merely to fulfill this requirement; serious in-depth discussion of the origins of the Holocaust is absent.

But in almost every case, whether the schools are Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or secular, public or private, the Holocaust is taught using books and media in which most of the German characters are cardboard caricatures of evil. The unintended effect of such books, 78 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, is to make moral judgment seem easy. It's obvious who the good guys and bad guys are. In *Irena's Children*, Nazis gun down children in cold blood and smash babies' heads against brick walls.

Well, what's wrong with telling such stories? These things did happen. Should we not remember them?

Crooked Timber

Rahav Gabay and her colleagues at Tel Aviv University have identified a personality trait they call "interpersonal victimhood." Gabay finds that you need not have suffered any trauma yourself to manifest interpersonal victimhood. You identify with the trauma of others and claim it as your own, thereby acquiring all the moral credit ordinarily ascribed to victims. One key component of interpersonal victimhood, according to Gabay, is *moral elitism*, the belief that you yourself are virtuous, especially compared to those you disagree with or dislike. Gabay and colleagues find that moral elitism is highly correlated with a lack of empathy, "the sense of entitlement to behave aggressively and selfishly." Moral elitism enables individuals "to feel morally superior even though they exhibit aggression."

Ruth Klüger, born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1931, survived three Nazi concentration camps: Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Gross-Rosen. She wrote about her experience in her 1992 memoir *Weiter Leben*. (Later, after retiring from her position as professor of German studies at the University of California, Irvine, Klüger wrote a modified version in English, *Still Alive*; 2001.) At a book signing, a young woman came up to her and said "I *love* the Holocaust"—by which the woman meant, she loved reading about the Holocaust. Klüger wanted to tell this woman, "You shouldn't. Stop reading these books, including mine, if you enjoy them." Klüger understood that the good feeling some people get from reading stories about the Holocaust is a feeling close to the moral elitism described by Gabay. *I am so much better than those evil Nazis*. Klüger recognized that such feelings are a temptation that must be resisted, not indulged.

Historians remind us that the Nazi movement was itself

launched and sustained by a sense of victimhood, beginning with the Germans' sense of having been victimized by the 1919 Versailles treaty; the hyperinflation of 1923, which destroyed the savings of middle-class Germans; and the punitive reparations scheme imposed by the Allies. (The American proposal would have required Germans to pay massive World War I reparations annually to the Allies through 1988.) The moral elitism arising from victimhood, and the lack of empathy that accompanies it, can lead otherwise good people to be cruel to others.

In 1934, Adolf Hitler was popular on the campuses of Germany's top universities. Leading intellectuals such as Martin Heidegger were members of the Nazi Party. German history, from 1932 to 1937, can teach us some lessons of tremendous importance if we are prepared to learn them. But the lesson to learn is not *I am such a good person, so much better than those evil Nazis.* The lesson should be: *Moral elitism feels good, but it is a temptation that I must resist. I must recognize and acknowledge my opponent's humanity.*

As Klüger observed, "we like self-serving solutions"—the easy trauma of reading stories about the Holocaust—but "we should beware of them, because they lead away from the truth." The truth is that you and I are not morally superior to the Germans who made Nazism possible. On the contrary, we are made from the same crooked timber as most of them.

Something Bigger than Ourselves

"But I would never smash a baby's head against a wall!" protest the students when I talk with them on this topic. Of course you wouldn't. That's when I tell those students about Melita Maschmann. When Hitler came to power in 1933, Maschmann was 15 years old. Her parents disliked Nazism and

Hitler, but Maschmann herself was fascinated by the Nazi promise of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a community "in which people of all classes would live together like brothers and sisters." In her memoir *Fazit* (available in English as *Account Rendered*; 1965), she wrote, "I longed to hurl myself into this current, to be submerged and borne along by it.... I wanted to help create the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] in which people would live together as in one big family." She and her friends in the Nazi movement had no interest in Nazi racial theories, which they considered silly. They made fun of racist Nazis, calling them n^2—*nordische Niete* (Nordic idiots)—or b^3—*blau, blond, und blöde* (blue-eyed, blond, and stupid). She emphasized that what first drew her into the Nazi movement was not hatred—of Jews, foreigners, or Communists—but love for her neighbors. In other words: Melita Maschmann was a warm-hearted teenage girl who wanted to devote herself to helping others. She joined the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, the girls' equivalent of the Hitler Youth, soon after, and served the party full-time upon reaching adulthood, until the end in 1945. The doubts only came years later, after the war.

Most of us have a desire to belong to something bigger than ourselves. Whether it's cheering at a football game, singing in a choir, or line-dancing at a wedding reception, there is a domain of human experience that can be enjoyed only in the company of *many* of our fellow creatures. Watching a football game on TV with a buddy at home is fine, but it's not the same as singing the team fight song in a stadium in unison with 90,000 other fans. Maschmann's memoir shows how the Nazis understood and exploited this primal human longing. Nazi mass festivities—such as the yearly Harvest Festival at Bückeberg attended by 500,000 or more; the Mayday celebrations; and of course the days-long Nuremberg rallies—were skillfully crafted to elicit and sustain this transcendent ecstasy.

It is popular today among intellectuals to devalue tribal expe-

riences. Instead of group ecstasy, we moderns focus on individual fulfillment, self-actualization rather than self-transcendence. But this emphasis on the individual impoverishes and flattens the human experience. To transcend oneself, to sacrifice oneself for others, to love all the world, can indeed be a pinnacle of moral experience. *Millions, be you embraced! This kiss for all the world!*

A Place for Compromise

In March 1940, six months into World War II and nine years before the publication of his dystopian novel *1984*, George Orwell wrote, "Nearly all western thought since the last war, certainly all 'progressive' thought, has assumed tacitly that human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security and avoidance of pain. In such a view of life there is no room, for instance, for patriotism and the military virtues." The Nazis, Orwell realized, understood something that the democracies did not:

> Hitler, because in his own joyless mind he feels it with exceptional strength, knows that human beings *don't* only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades.... Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people, "I offer you a good time," Hitler has said to them, "I offer you struggle, danger and death," and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.

I have found this passage to be a useful starting point for group conversation with high school students. The passage itself is so

provocative that it needs no introduction besides an explanation of when it was written. Just say, "What do you guys think about that?" and you will get a show of hands. The majority will agree that life should be about more than having fun and living comfortably. There will sometimes be one boy (and it's always a boy) who will say something like, "Life is a game. Whoever dies with the most toys, wins." But he is an outlier. Most of the kids are longing for something higher and deeper than social media and video games, something more than big homes, fancy vacations, and luxury cars.

Some students say that they have found their cause in politics. Those who are left-of-center will speak, sometimes passionately, about the evils of Donald Trump and the importance of fighting for abortion rights. Students on the right will talk with equal passion about the craziness of transgender activism and the unfairness of biological males competing against girls. Instead of responding to such claims, I call the students' attention to the street fighting that was common in German cities in 1932. Activists on the left and right battled one another with fists, clubs, and, occasionally, knives and guns. Imagine that you were leading a political party on "your" side in 1932, I ask the students. Could you imagine some resolution of your differences other than the total defeat of your adversary? Can you see how the strength of democracy might lie not in one party's absolute victory, but in compromises between opposing parties?

These ideas are completely novel to most American teens today. But I am encouraged by how open most kids are to considering the possibility that there might be some way to heal our fractured republic other than one side triumphing over and utterly dominating the other.

Right now, in the United States, loud voices on both the left and right complain of being victimized. They trumpet that they are

morally superior to their opponents, that their opponents are not only mistaken but evil. The way we are teaching the Holocaust actually encourages kids to adopt a perspective that us-versus-them is equivalent to good-versus-evil, which rules out compromise. But I have seen firsthand how the lessons of German history, particularly in the years between 1932 and 1937, can be instructive for American kids today.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle wrote that man is the worst of all animals when separated from law and justice. I recently shared a podium at a conference with Timothy Jackson, professor of theology at Emory and author, most recently, of the book *Mordecai Would Not Bow Down: Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Christian Supersessionism* (2021). Dr. Jackson agreed with the points I am making here and then in effect applied Aristotle's dictum to this topic: "If you don't recognize your own inner Nazi," he remarked, "then you've missed the whole point of studying the Holocaust."

I think these lessons are useful. And I think my mom would be proud.

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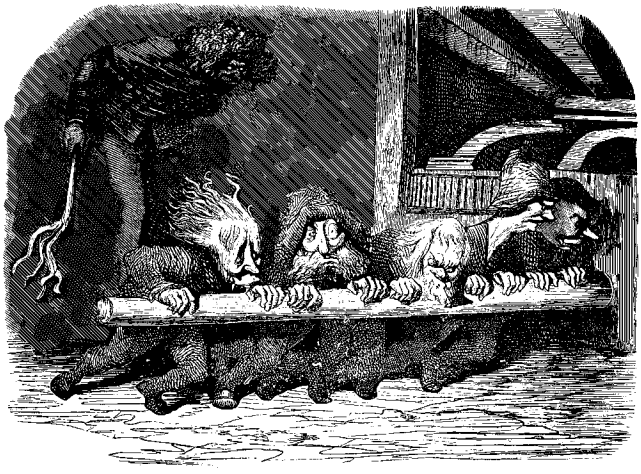

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Book Review by Joseph M. Bessette

Let the Punishment Fit the Crime

What's Prison For?: Punishment and Rehabilitation in the Age of Mass Incarceration, by Bill Keller. Columbia Global Reports, 160 pages, $16 (paper)

Criminal (In)Justice: What the Push for Decarceration and Depolicing Gets Wrong and Who it Hurts Most, by Rafael A. Mangual. Center Street, 256 pages, $29 (cloth), $18.99 (paper)

The Myth of Overpunishment: A Defense of the American Justice System and a Proposal to Reduce Incarceration While Protecting the Public, by Barry Latzer. Republic Book Publishers, 208 pages, $24.95

"This country," writes Bill Keller in *What's Prison For?: Punishment and Rehabilitation in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, "imprisons more people more copiously than almost any other place on earth." This reality has led to "a growing consensus that we lock up too many people for too long." Keller is a former executive editor of *The New York Times* and the founding editor-in-chief of the Marshall Project, a nonprofit news organization that covers criminal justice in the United States. His slim, readable volume is one of the latest additions to the burgeoning literature decrying "mass incarceration" in the United States.

The author wastes no time in telling the reader what should be done about this state of affairs: decriminalize such minor crimes as "low-level drug offenses"; divert some criminals to "mental health and addiction programs, or probation or community service"; "abolish mandatory minimum sentences and encourage prosecutors and judges to apply the least severe punishment appropriate under the circumstances"; "raise the age at which accused youngsters are subject to adult punishment"; "give compassionate release to old and infirm inmates"; and "reduce the use of cash bail." The evidence of recent years, he claims, demonstrates that states "can cut prison populations without jeopardizing safety." There is an urgent need to "muster the political will" to reform, if not abolish, "[t]he American way of incarceration," which "is a shameful waste of lives and money, feeding a pathological cycle of poverty, community dysfunction, crime, and hopelessness." Perhaps the most formidable barrier to the necessary reform is the "punitive streak"—"the yearning for retribution"—that runs through the history of American criminal justice. "But a humane society," he holds, "cannot be driven solely by anger."

Keller describes his book as "a work of journalism, not social science or political advocacy, but I have searched both science and politics for credible evidence of what works." If by "political advocacy" Keller means advocating for one political party over the other, then, yes, he avoids advocacy of that sort. Indeed, he spends considerable time describing and praising the growing opposition to the nation's incarceration policies among conservatives. But there is no denying that *What's Prison For?* is a work of advocacy. The whole point of the book, which focuses on rehabilitation programs in prisons, is to advocate for treating prisoners differently than we now do, for constructing prisons that would look more like college campuses, for plowing more resources into rehabilitation programs, and for looking to Europe, especially Germany and Norway, for models to guide us.

Keller canvasses the four main purposes of prisons and finds all but rehabilitation wanting. The first, *retribution*—or "punishment…[as] an end in itself"—assumes the offender's free will. Yet, research has shown that the propensity to commit crimes "begins in the first years of life," and no one is responsible for how they were raised. Besides, while a lengthy prison sentence for a serious violent crime may seem just, "the scales tip toward injustice when you add in all the collateral suffering common in prison," such as the strong tormenting the weak, separation from families, the loneliness of solitary confinement, and the risk of disease.

Keller displays his opposition to retribution, or what is sometimes called "just deserts" (a term he does not use), when he discusses Norway's most notorious prison inmate: Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 individuals (mostly teenagers and young adults) in 2011 when he was 32 years old. He received the maximum sentence of 21 years, putting him on the path to release at age 53. A special provision of Norwegian law allows continued detention if a

judge every five years determines that Breivik remains a threat to society. Although Breivik is isolated from other inmates, "this is isolation Norway-style." He has a living room, a study room, and an exercise room. According to the deputy warden at the facility, he "has staff around him all day. He has access to counselors, religious services…. He's a student at the university…. He votes when there's an election, like everybody else." The original New York Times article, from which Keller draws, adds that Breivik also has a television and a laptop, though not internet access.

Keller endorses Norway's rejection of retribution, even in such extreme cases, but he does not tell us whether he would endorse Breivik's release at age 53 if the authorities were convinced that he was no longer a threat to society. And if not, why not? Once you have removed justice as the ground for punishment, why keep anyone in prison, no matter how horrendous their offense(s), if you are convinced that they are no longer a threat to society? It seems likely that Norwegian authorities will find a way to keep Breivik in prison for the rest of his life, or close to it. But is this because he will always be dangerous, or because granting him ten, 20, or 30 years of freedom would be an affront to the moral order? Certainly, to most Americans even life in prison under the conditions in which Breivik lives would violate any common-sense view of just punishment for his deeds.

Although Keller does not summarily reject prison's second and third main purposes, *incapacitation* and *deterrence*, he believes that the crime reduction effects of each have been greatly exaggerated by "tough-on-crime enthusiasts." He insists that incapacitation—which seems to be "the most practical justification for locking people up"—doesn't have nearly the economic or public safety benefits that many believe. He approvingly cites one

policy expert who holds that "the crime problem can never be substantially reduced through incapacitation alone." It is hard to know what to make of this. There are a finite number of dangerous repeat offenders in American society. If you put a significant fraction of them behind bars, crime will, in fact, be substantially reduced over what it otherwise would have been.

Deterrence gets even less respect from Keller, for it assumes that the potential offender "consider[s] the risks versus the gains of her crime." Keller holds instead that "much criminal behavior is spontaneous, or nearly so," and that when offenders do weigh risks, "the risk that looms largest by far is the chance of being caught" rather than the subsequent punishment. Yet fully two fifths of those serving time in federal or state prisons in the United States are in for robbery (taking someone's property through the use or threat of force), for a property crime such as burglary, or for drug trafficking—all crimes committed for financial gain. Perform a simple thought experiment. Imagine that an American state announced that from now on it would no longer send robbers or burglars to prison, no matter how big the financial gain, how many were victimized, or how often the crimes were repeated. Is it conceivable that robberies and burglaries wouldn't increase?

This leaves *rehabilitation*. Keller rightly notes that nearly everyone now in prison will eventually be released, and that sky-high recidivism rates—two thirds or more of released inmates are arrested for a new crime within three years and four fifths within ten years—demonstrate that our prisons do not now do a very good job of rehabilitating criminals. To his credit, Keller recognizes that "[i]t is not easy to change people who do not want to change." Perhaps the distinctive contribution of *What's Prison For?* is Keller's portrayal of the many dedicated individuals (including some former inmates) who have devoted themselves to turning around the

lives of prisoners, either while they are serving time or after they are released. In his final chapter Keller recounts his own contribution as a teacher of a college-level class on journalism to inmates at Sing-Sing Correctional Facility, north of New York City.

As is evident from their titles, both Rafael Mangual's *Criminal (In)Justice: What the Push for Decarceration and Depolicing Gets Wrong and Who it Hurts Most* and Barry Latzer's *The Myth of Overpunishment: A Defense of the American Justice System and a Proposal to Reduce Incarceration While Protecting the Public* push back hard against the over-incarceration narrative. While dozens of books advance the narrative, these challenge it head-on.

By criminal "(in)justice" Mangual means the failure of the criminal justice system "to incapacitate repeat offenders" who perpetrate "heinous and serious crimes" when they should have been "behind bars at the time." The problem we face is not excessive punitiveness but "misguided leniency." A senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute who describes himself as "a journalist formally trained in law," he draws on a wealth of criminal justice data and research to make his case.

One of Mangual's recurring themes is how "hyper-concentrated" serious violent crime is in the United States—"both geographically (in small slices of metro areas) and demographically (among young, disproportionately Black and Latino males)." Although this is not news, the data are startling. In 2019, for example, the city of Chicago had a murder rate of 18.2 per 100,000 residents, more than three times the national rate of 5.0. But *within* Chicago, where the author moved for law school in 2012, the ten most violent communities, in which about a sixth of the city's residents lived, had a murder rate of 61.7, *over twelve times* the national average. In one of these, the murder rate was a staggering 131.9. (This community,

with 17,433 residents, had 23 murders—only two fewer that year than in the entire country of Norway with its population of 5.3 million.) Yet in this same city, 17 neighborhoods saw not a single murder and another eleven had only one each. Collectively, these 28 communities, with about a quarter of the city's population, had a murder rate of just 1.6—less than 10% of the citywide murder rate, and only a third of the national rate. Thus, about a quarter of Chicagoans, living in a city infamous for its violent crime problem, reside in communities that, at least by the homicide measure, are much safer than the nation as a whole, while a sixth of the city's residents reside in communities that are vastly more dangerous.

Mangual asks the reader to imagine being "randomly dropped over a point in the United States." The likelihood is quite high that you will land in a place where there are few, if any, murders. But if 10,000 others participate in the exercise, an "unlucky few" will find themselves dropping into "some of the most dangerous places on earth." Given the enormous variation in crime rates, aggregate national data are not particularly meaningful and it makes little sense "to suggest a general direction *the nation* ought to take as to criminal justice questions" (emphasis in the original). Practically speaking, what this means is that the so-called "reform" efforts of recent years—decarceration and constraining police—will put in jeopardy not the vast majority of Americans who live in safe communities but rather the minorities and the poor who live where serious violent crime is a daily occurrence. Those ten most dangerous communities in Chicago, for example, are each at least 90% black and Hispanic—eight of them, 95%.

Mangual brings to bear an impressive array of data to demonstrate that America's prisons are filled with "violent and/or repeat offenders that are highly likely to re-

offend once released." Drawing primarily on studies from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, he reports that: (a) state prisoners released in recent years had compiled an average of 10-12 arrests and 5-6 convictions prior to their most recent admission to prison; (b) that more than three fifths of state prisoners are serving time for a violent crime or a weapons offense; (c) that only 14% of state prisoners are in for a drug offense, and the vast majority of these for drug trafficking; (d) that about half of state prison inmates serve 15 months or less, with 42% serving less than a year; and (e) that within 9-10 years of release, more than four fifths of former inmates are rearrested, averaging about five new arrests each.

He cautions that even inmates serving time for nonviolent offenses can be dangerous after release, for "[c]riminals don't really specialize." Recidivism studies show that more than a third of those in prison for a drug offense and two fifths for a property crime "were rearrested for at least one violent post-release offense." To send fewer dangerous criminals to prison in the first place or to reduce their time behind bars is a sure recipe for increasing the criminal victimization of minorities in high-crime neighborhoods.

Mangual is equally critical of proposals to radically "reform" policing in the United States by, for example, defunding the police, ending qualified immunity when police officers use force, and diverting many calls for service from police to mental health professionals. He evaluates these and related recommendations against one key criterion: whether the proposal would "significantly reduce police uses of force and do so without significantly harming the public's safety." Though Mangual concedes that "every year there are many documented instances of excessive police force," these are not "actually representative of a larger pattern." Here, he shows just how rarely police use force in carrying out their duties. Each year

police discharge firearms about 3,000 times, but this is for almost 700,000 full-time police officers making over 10 million arrests during more than 60 million contacts with the American public. Although about a third of the shootings by police result in death, 93% of the suspects were armed. The numbers simply don't match the overheated rhetoric of celebrities like LeBron James, who said in 2020 that black people feel the police are "hunting" them. In the end, "there isn't a whole lot of room for a massive reduction in police violence." It is important to be "sober and realistic about just how much we can expect to reduce an already exceedingly rare occurrence."

It is impossible to describe here all the useful information and arguments Mangual brings to the debate over punishment in the United States. I will add only one more example. Opponents of incarceration frequently chastise the criminal justice system for "tearing families apart." This complaint has made headway with conservatives like Utah senator Mike Lee, who in 2015 criticized a "penitentiary approach to punishment" for "sever[ing] the offenders' ties to their family." Mangual asks a hard question about the assumption behind this criticism: do the kinds of people who end up in prison make "good parents—that is, reliable sources of economic and emotional support whose presence in a child's life produces benefits that outweigh the costs of that parent's absence"? The evidence he reviews supports the conclusion that "[e]xposure to highly antisocial parents…makes it more likely that a child will develop serious behavior problems" and that "[s]uch exposure seems to also be criminogenic for children." Mangual cites a 2021 paper in the *American Economic Review* that found that "parental incarceration has beneficial effects on children, reducing their likelihood of incarceration by 4.9 percentage points and improving their

adult socioeconomic status." Failing to incarcerate a large number of serious violent offenders or accelerating their return from prison to their homes may harm the very children that the proponents of decarceration claim their policies would help.

In *The Myth of Overpunishment*, Barry Latzer, an emeritus professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, presents some of the same compelling data about prison inmates and their propensity to reoffend. Before he gets to the current state of affairs, he devotes the first third of his book to "A Short History of Punishment in America," in which he covers the use of corporal punishment and public shaming in colonial America, the harsh conditions of the first penitentiaries in the early 1800s (though introduced as more humane than corporal punishment), the brutality of the Southern practice after the Civil War of leasing convict labor to private corporations and later replacing this with prison farms and chain gangs, and the decline in the use of the death penalty. Compared to how we treated criminals in the past, "[t]he punishments we impose today are less harsh, less racist, and more lenient than they ever have been. By historical standards there is no case for overpunishment."

In the 20th century the trend toward greater leniency accelerated, particularly "from the 1930s to the late 1960s." One major factor was the drive toward "community corrections," which called for greater use of (a) probation instead of prison for convicted offenders and (b) parole release from prison before offenders had served their full sentence. The reform movement came "to a screeching halt" during "the great crime tsunami, perhaps the biggest violent crime wave in American history, which ran from the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1990s." Latzer holds that although one cannot prove that the "flabby justice system" of the mid-20th century "en-

couraged more crime," the connection "seems intuitively obvious." Other factors were also at play, such as "the size of the young male population, the strength of police forces, [and] the availability of drugs and guns."

Though the response to the "crime tsunami" did not come right away—the nation's imprisonment rate actually fell between 1960 and the early 1970s despite a huge increase in serious and violent crimes during these years—the response did come: "Gradually, but steadily, the criminal justice system was strengthened and more criminals were apprehended and punished…. More and more offenders were being incarcerated, and many of them were kept behind bars longer." Eventually, crime peaked in the early '90s and then dropped dramatically in the subsequent decades. Latzer holds that just as punishing *less* leads to more crime, punishing *more* makes for less crime. He cites the prominent economist Steven Levitt, whose research found that "the increase in the prison population was the most significant factor in the crime decline of the 1990s." Research by two other economists led them to conclude: "more prison, less crime."

In his penultimate chapter, Latzer dismisses various proposals to drastically reduce prison populations. Some on the Left "seek full-fledged abolition—an end to prisons altogether." This would come hand in hand with a radical reshaping of American society, in order to eliminate what they see as the very fountainheads of crime, such as "racism, poverty, homelessness, and… lack of opportunity." But, Latzer asks, "if crime will not be abolished or sharply diminished in the near future, what will replace incarceration?"

Some propose "restorative justice" as an alternative for at least some incarceration. According to the Restorative Justice Exchange

of Prison Fellowship International, the Christian organization founded by former Richard Nixon aide Charles Colson, the "core elements of restorative justice are the interconnected concepts of Encounter, Repair, and Transform." Typically, the offender and the victim meet together with a trained facilitator to engage in "a journey toward wellbeing and wholeness that victims, offenders, and community members can experience. Encounter leads to repair, and repair leads to transformation."

Latzer believes that restorative justice programs may be effective for minor crimes—that is, for offenders unlikely to go to prison in the first place. But for serious and violent offenders, such programs can be useful only as a supplement, not an alternative, to incarceration. This is for two reasons. First, to protect the community dangerous criminals must be incapacitated, and a community-based restorative justice program will not do that. Second, and equally important, "the public's sense of justice requires punishment. Retribution may be out of favor with progressives, but it is an essential ingredient in every criminal justice system." Justice requires that the punishment fit the crime. In some broad sense, the harm that the state causes to the criminal by denying him his liberty for some months or years must be commensurate with, or proportionate to, the harm that the criminal perpetrated upon the victim.

Latzer then examines, and rejects, proposals by organizations such as the Brennan Center for Justice to reduce the nation's prison population by two fifths. One of the Center's two principal recommendations is to reduce sentence length for the most serious offenses by 25%. According to its 2016 report, covered offenses would include "aggravated assault, murder, nonviolent weapons offense, robbery, serious burglary, and serious drug trafficking." The Center reports that these "six major crimes…

make up the bulk of the current prison population." Latzer notes that for unstated reasons rape is not listed among the crimes eligible for major sentencing reductions. He speculates that the authors may have feared "backlash from feminists and Progressives for proposing the early release of rapists." (Currently, those convicted of rape or sexual assault constitute fully 12%, or about one in eight, of all state prison inmates.) For Latzer the incapacitative effects of prison, especially given high recidivism rates, are enough to reject a 25% reduction in time served for our most dangerous offenders.

The Brennan Center's other proposal is to eliminate prison altogether for what it calls "lower-level crimes." These include, as Latzer lists them, "drug possession and 'minor' drug trafficking, 'lesser' burglary, simple assault, and fraud, forgery, or theft of property valued at up to $10,000." He predicts that these proposals, if enacted, "would help spur a new crime wave and would almost certainly set off a public revolt." Indeed, "some of these crimes may not be low-level in fact." Because of plea bargaining, "the incident that actually occurred may have been much more serious than the plea suggests." (Note also that in the vast majority of these cases judges had the discretion to send the offender to prison or not. Relying on the details of the instant offense and the full criminal history of the offender, a judge decided that prison was the appropriate punishment. Isn't this the kind of individualized justice extolled by critics of mandatory sentences?) Latzer also predicts that a "$10,000 cap on thefts would create open season for car theft or expensive bicycle larcenies." (Some shoplifters in California carefully track the value of their thefts in any one incident so as not to exceed $950, the point at which the crime becomes a felony. You could do quite a bit more shoplifting with a $10,000 cap.) Latzer does not believe that "the public would stand for this." Proposals like those advanced by the Brennan

Center, he concludes, show that such groups are "totally out of touch with the American people."

There seems to be no bridging the gap between the progressives (and their conservative allies) who call for vast reductions in prison populations and those like Rafael Mangual and Barry Latzer who defend the crime-reduction benefits of current incarceration policies. Yet in his final chapter, titled "E-carceration," Latzer offers a provocative proposal for making a dent in incarceration rates without jeopardizing public safety. He reports that as of 2015, about 125,000 people in the United States (in all 50 states and the District of Columbia) were being monitored by GPS tracking devices typically attached as ankle bracelets. He argues for improving and expanding electronic monitoring to most, perhaps all, of those on probation or parole in the United States (nearly 4 million Americans as of 2020). The system can be programmed to set off an alarm at the monitoring agency if the offender goes somewhere he is not allowed—such as outside his residence if he has been sentenced to home confinement. Also, by tracking all the offender's movements, the system can aid criminal investigations by showing whether the person being tracked was present at the scene of a crime.

Latzer presents evidence that close electronic monitoring of this sort ("full-time, 24/7") reduces recidivism during the time the offender is being tracked. It is, after all, "intrusive and restricts individual freedom"—though it is not, of course, as restrictive as incarceration. He notes that it will take a major infusion of personnel "to monitor the software as it reports violations," but if it reduces incarceration, it will still save money. He acknowledges, though, that, unlike prisons, electronic monitoring doesn't actually prevent offenders from committing new crimes. Nothing incapacitates re-

peat offenders as effectively as confinement in a secure facility.

Perhaps the key limitation of "[p]resent-day technology" is that it "cannot determine when the subject is committing a crime." It turns out, however, that new technology may make it possible not just to track an offender's location but also to monitor his behavior: "If true, this could be a game-changer for penology." This would be something like the body cameras that police wear. The offender would wear a "body sensor harness" that would capture audio and video and communicate these to monitors. "The harness would have to operate and be worn at all times, 24/7, which would," Latzer acknowledges, "create some difficulties." Though activities like swimming or bathing may not be compatible with current technology, this problem could be solved by making sensors "smaller and more water-resistant." Advocates of using such technology to track location, audio, and video claim that sophisticated new software may make it possible for the system to "inform the monitoring agents or the police when the subject was violating the law."

Some propose one additional element: the ability to administer an electronic shock (like that from a taser) through the ankle bracelet to incapacitate the offender until police arrived whenever the monitored individual violated geographic restrictions, "commit[ted] harmful acts," or tried to "disable or remove their ankle bracelets." The shock would be administered either automatically, as dictated by the software program, or by the officials monitoring the system.

Would American courts allow such intrusive monitoring? Latzer, who also has a law degree and previously worked as both a prosecutor and defense attorney, is, of course, aware of the issue. He shows that not all courts have upheld even GPS monitoring of an offender's location. It is very much an open question whether new types of more intrusive monitoring would pass scrutiny in

state and federal courts. Proponents would likely argue, not unreasonably, that such monitoring will never pose as great a constraint on the offender's freedom as serving time in a medium or maximum security prison.

So, what's the payout in terms of incarceration? Though Latzer does not try to quantify just how much "e-carceration" might reduce prison populations, he does note that each year about 294,000 probationers and 111,000 parolees violate the conditions of their supervision and are sent (probationers) or returned (parolees) to prison. If expanded electronic monitoring could reduce these numbers by deterring at least some from reoffending, the effects on prison populations would not be trivial. (At the end of 2021, state prisons in the United States housed 1,047,008 criminals, and federal prisons another 157,314.)

Latzer reports that some advocates of the new "[t]echnological incarceration" promise that it will virtually replace prisons altogether by reducing the incarcerated population by as much as 95%. These proponents would reserve prison for those who commit the most heinous murders and those who violate the conditions of electronic supervision. Consequently, all those who rape, rob, and assault their fellow human beings, as well as most murderers, would never see the inside of a prison cell if they behaved while being electronically monitored.

In evaluating e-carceration's practicality and public-safety impact, the key divide seems to be between (a) using enhanced electronic monitoring to do a better job of supervising offenders already in the community, and (b) using it as a straight-out alternative to traditional incarceration. While Latzer embraces the former, he is not as certain about the latter. As he rightly notes, electronic monitoring, no matter how advanced, "cannot meet the punitive or

retributive aims of the criminal justice system. And retribution—justice—will always be at the heart of any criminal justice system." Moreover, it is hard to see, based on Latzer's defense of incarceration earlier in the book, that it could ever incapacitate or deter as effectively as imprisonment.

Recent spikes in violent crime, especially in our cities, have raised the specter of another "crime tsunami" of the sort that swept the nation from the 1960s into the early '90s. The subsequent decades of falling crime rates made us complacent, but the debate about crime and punishment is now renewed. The stakes are extraordinarily high for those who live in the neighborhoods where, as Mangual shows, serious and violent crime is hyper-concentrated. You might have thought that the clear lesson of the past half-century—punish less and crime will increase; punish more and it will decrease—would have been indelibly imprinted on the minds of the nation's political elites and criminal justice policymakers. But apparently this vital lesson has to be taught, and learned, all over again.

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Essay by Diana Schaub

After Manliness

The age of LGBTQIA.

Harvey C. Mansfield's 2006 book, *Manliness*, was a response to the gender-neutral society. Bold, stark, no subtitle: simply *Manliness*. Seventeen years and several twists in the sexual revolution later, it is time to revisit his argument. Has gender-neutrality become so dominant that we must now banish the word "manliness" from our vocabulary? In keeping with the Harvard government professor's forthrightness, our

theme is how manliness is faring under the contemporary regime of gender-neutrality. The first thing to note is that *under* is a position that manliness chafes against. It prefers to be over, above, on top, in command.

Curiously, despite the boldness of his title and his many provocations throughout, Mansfield does not call for the restoration of manliness to its former glory. He is, in the end, only a moderate defender of manliness. There are good reasons to doubt the goodness of manliness, prime among them its stubborn resistance to listening to good reasons. There isn't, moreover, any actual dearth of manliness. Despite the cancelation of the word, Mansfield finds there is plenty of the thing itself among us—too much, in fact. What has happened is that manliness has been refashioned, through gender-neutral language, into "autonomy," "independence," and "transcendence"—and thereby brought within range of everyone.

As I argued in my *CRB* review at the time ("Man's Field," Spring 2006),

> [i]n the past, manliness was characteristic of men, and not all men, but only a portion of them: the manly men. Manly men ruled, but they did not rule absolutely; they were kept in check by the unmanly, particularly by women and philosophers. Mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters let their sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers know when the courage and protective manliness on which women depended had crossed the line into rashness or tyranny or male bull-headed idiocy. Whereas a woman spoke (or, more accurately, complained) only to the men in her domestic circle, the philosophers (being men themselves) abstracted from the personalism of women and generalized the critique. Socrates and Plato challenged Homer and the Homeric heroes; Aristotle sought

to tame the militaristic manliness of the Greeks by pointing out that war should be pursued for the sake of peace. Both women and philosophers have traditionally been critics of manliness, but appreciative critics.

Or another way of saying the same thing, they have been, like Mansfield, modest defenders of manliness, aware that manliness as an element of human nature cannot be extinguished, and thus that a tempered and civilized version of it is necessary if only to defend against the unlimited, tyrannical variety. Without the heroic manliness of Volodymyr Zelensky to inspire the Ukrainian people, the barbarism of bare-chested Vladimir Putin will triumph.

We can see the threat of extreme manliness in Putin, in Islamic terrorism, and in our homegrown disordered masculinity. According to the FBI, there are 33,000 active gangs in the United States. You can probably name a few: the Bloods, the Latin Kings, the Cosa Nostra. Male bonding can go seriously awry. But its absence is dangerous, too. In the news we find desperately alone and angry adolescent males who shoot up schools. Our politicians respond with calls to limit access to guns and increase access to mental health professionals. Their diagnosis, however, does not reach the spiritual crisis afflicting young males. As Friedrich Nietzsche predicted, thoroughgoing nihilists would rather will "nothingness" than not will. Driven by rage and resentment, they seek to annihilate the world.

This is one face of "autonomy." But there are others. According to the genealogy that Mansfield traces, when manliness was driven underground and forced to assume various gender-neutral aliases it became noxious. In being separated from males and universalized, manliness slipped its always tenuous moral moorings. The heart of *Manliness* traces how traditional manly assertion was transformed

into manly nihilism (via Charles Darwin and Nietzsche) and in turn how manly nihilism was embraced by the woman warrior, Simone de Beauvoir, who refashioned it into radical feminism's womanly nihilism.

Nietzsche in Drag

Radical feminism remains womanly in its methods, relying on the revaluation of values through "consciousness-raising" and a schoolmarmish control of language (especially pronouns) rather than violence, but its aim is to release women from their subordination to men by overcoming women's enslavement to their own biology. For Beauvoir, women have historically been despicably mired in immanence and passivity. They must rise from immanence to transcendence, rejecting the falsity of essences (like the eternal feminine) for the freedom of creative self-definition. Radical feminism thus imitates and vindicates the Nietzschean overman (or *trans*man) as the height of human striving. As Mansfield succinctly puts it, Beauvoir is Nietzsche in drag.

Because nihilism denies a human essence, it denies also the political and moral significance of the bifurcation of that human essence into male and female natures. When there is no sense of one's own being and no higher being or end for assertiveness to serve, then assertion itself becomes the be-all and end-all of human existence. Assertion runs riot. Manliness loses its protective, responsible, (dare we say with approval) "patriarchal" side. It becomes virulent rather than virtuous. Mansfield shows the dark side of the force at work, especially in its disguised modern forms, which include scientific nihilism as well as feminist nihilism.

Unlike the psychologists and neurologists who reductively study men in bits and pieces, Mansfield seeks to assemble and assess male

nature as a coherent whole. Though academic studies of sex differences have documented certain traits in men, like aggression and spatial reasoning, almost no researcher has ever bothered to ask, "[H]ow is spatial ability in men related to their aggression?" Mansfield not only asks the question, he answers it, with a concise account of the deep link between aggression and abstraction, which are "two forms of being single-minded." Mansfield, however, quickly transcends the realm of generic masculinity. He turns instead to poets and novelists as better guides than biologists and social scientists to the higher and more exclusive levels of manliness, where manliness is both more admirable and on occasion more shameful—as in the hot-blooded, honor-driven errors of *The Iliad*'s Ajax. Literature also teaches us about the civilized manliness of the gentleman. The very highest reach of manliness is visible in the courageous philosopher, whose inner freedom of mind is compatible with politic care for the salutary prejudices of ordinary life.

By the time his tour of manliness is complete, Mansfield has made the case for a properly circumscribed manliness, a manliness that would remain within the horizon of morality—a manliness attentive to the welfare of weaker and more vulnerable human beings, especially the weaker sex. With a frankness that he admits is ungentlemanly, Mansfield insists on women's weakness. Returning manliness to these civilized bounds, however, will be difficult, because getting manliness to walk the line, Johnny-Cash style, depends greatly on how that weaker sex behaves. Mansfield agrees with Alexis de Tocqueville that it is women who establish the moral horizon through their privileged position in the domestic sphere.

Nonetheless, he does not endorse a return to the separate-spheres arrangement and the model of republican womanhood that Tocqueville (and before him Jean-Jacques Rousseau) had praised. In fact, he dismisses as reactionary the strict division of labor based

on sexual complementarity (in which men and women, equally valued, are understood to have different natures, different virtues, and different responsibilities). Following John Stuart Mill (rather than Tocqueville), the contemporary world now understands sexual equality in the economic and individualistic terms of equal access to education and the professions. Mansfield does not call for any curtailment there. He does, however, envision some redrawing of the public/private distinction in American life. He suggests that we take advantage of the liberal distinction between state and society. In public and under the law, we should continue to insist on the liberal formality of gender neutrality, but in private there should be a more honest acknowledgment of gender differences—and yes, even the truth of age-old stereotypes. In sum: let us follow John Stuart Mill in public and Aristotle in private.

A Divided Community

After that quick overview of Professor Mansfield's book, I'd to like to make some observations about what has changed on the sex and gender front in the 17 years since *Manliness* was published, and then see whether its framework helps us understand what is happening now and where we might be headed.

Although the gay rights movement was already in full swing during the decade of the aughts, Mansfield chose to say very little about it. Nonetheless, I think one could conclude that the advent of same-sex marriage was a predictable extension of the gender-neutral society. If the sexual difference between men and women is to go unnoticed in the law, then soon enough the difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality will go unnoticed also. Of course, for individuals, the directionality of one's *eros* matters intensely, but society at large no longer cares whether an individ-

ual is attracted to the same or the opposite sex. Thus, we have gay marriages, and gay divorces. We also have gay families. Yet honesty compels us to admit that each member of a gay family is the result of heterosexual congress. Egg and sperm must be conjoined somehow, if only at the level of the gametes in a petri dish. Because no same-sex pairing is capable of reproducing from within itself, the fundamental difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality remains. Aristotle's definition of the household as requiring the conjoining of male and female for the sake of the future has not been invalidated.

It has been resolutely or manfully ignored, however, and the movement to overcome sexual differences has transitioned to new fields, as the increasingly unwieldy acronym LGBTQIA testifies. The central letter now is T for transgender. How did this come about? I suspect the path was blazed by the manly confidence of drag queens. There is a gay male subculture of female impersonators. Leave it to a man to think he can best a woman at her own game! This exaggerated femininity, all glitz and glam, is meant to deconstruct gender. It creates a campy parody of a woman. Some at least discovered that they weren't playacting, that they wanted to cross the line permanently. Drag performances offered space to try out their new identity. This has occasioned something of a split within the alphabet soup community—the acronym LGBTQIA has always been more a record of divisions than a community. (Gay diva RuPaul initially declared that transwomen were not welcome on his *Drag Race* reality show because, after all, they weren't in drag if they were women rather than female impersonators.)

The trans movement represents an interesting shift—a shift, we might say, from *eros* to *thumos*. The movement used to be about "the love that dare not speak its name," which is to say it concerned the status of an erotic orientation and the legal and social acceptabil-

ity of such relationships. By contrast, the new issue is remarkably unerotic. It is about gender, but a gender identity stripped of connection to others and wretchedly self-involved. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the TQIA trajectory terminates with the letter A, which stands for a-sexual or a-romantic. This is not the richly embroidered scarlet letter of Hester Prynne's adultery. Exactly how the wider world is denying rights or "visibility" to those who prefer their own company is a little unclear—maybe romantic comedies are a microaggression against them.

Obsessed with the Body

But to return to those in transition. "Trans" is the new incarnation of Beauvoir's transcendence. The demand made on society for this specific class of persons is to be gender-affirming, not gender-neutral. This is somewhat at odds with another idea out there, symbolized by the Q of TQIA. Q stands for queer, and those who now embrace this erstwhile slur view gender as non-binary. What is purely a matter of construction can be deconstructed at will. The "genderqueer" or gender-nonconforming encourage experimentation with various permutations of gender. There is an admission here that gender-neutrality, and attempts to raise non-stereotypical boys and girls, never made much headway. It seems that most people conform. They are "cisgender," which is to say they dress and behave pretty much as one might expect based on the old stereotypes. Indeed, over the last couple of decades, the secondary sex characteristics have come back in fashion. Men have returned to facial hair in a big way—they may have to cultivate sensitivity, but they look like lumberjacks. And women, at least those who didn't grow up in the 1970s, have returned to wearing dresses and long hair.

By contrast with the genderqueer, the transgender feel in their spirit or their bones or maybe just in their head that they are wrongly classed with the group whose biological apparatus they have mistakenly been saddled with. I guess there are rare genuine instances of such incongruity in nature's intention. As Aristotle long ago pointed out, nature wishes to do certain things that are not, however, always realized. Modern science is ready on the spot with drugs and surgeries to accomplish what used to be called "gender reassignment," but which is now called "gender confirmation." It might be of value to press on the gender essentialism of the transgender by asking, "What is the essence of a woman such that one could be a woman in spirit though a man in form, or vice versa, a man in spirit though a woman in form? What are the qualities or the capacities or the virtues that one is seeking? Could one manifest those without a physical fix? Why does the physical matter so much, if one's essence already is as one asserts it to be?"

It is a potent sign of the modern world's materialism that both the transgender and the genderqueer—both those who want to be more identifiably gendered and those who want to be more indeterminate or in-between—are so focused, not to say obsessed, with the body, its hormones, and its presentation. Despite our tendency to medicalize everything, there is a growing awareness, especially among parents, of the medical malfeasance at work in so readily confirming what might be a fad or a phase.

Decades ago, the transgender were usually individuals born male. For some few, social and medical transition brought psychic harmony. The situation has changed dramatically of late, with a rash of girls deciding they are boys. Why? If they just want to do boy stuff, like play baseball and ditch the dolls, well, American parents have always given girls leeway to be tomboys. Indeed, girls used to have considerably more flexibility than did boys to be gen-

der-nonconforming. Apparently, feminism and its offspring, the sexual revolution, have not improved girlhood in America. With no resources in religion or public opinion to resist the relentless reduction of everything to bodies, it's no wonder that girls today have no idea what it might mean to be a woman, in any other sense than that presented by our hypersexualized culture. For pre-teen and teenage girls, transitioning is a fashionable way out of their confusion and moral dilemmas. This is the destructive terminus of the deep misogyny behind radical feminism. Though Beauvoir called for transcendence rather than transitioning, transitioning is the effectual truth of her hatred of "the second sex." Why remain in second place if one doesn't have to?

Transcendence

The trans phenomenon will not stop with transiting between Venus and Mars. Trans-humanism is now on the horizon. This is not the spiritualized version that Nietzsche hinted at. Today's transhumanism focuses on the body and its reconfiguration. Take the mania for tattoos, piercings, and scarification, where the body is regarded as a canvas for idiosyncratic artistic re-creation. Tattooing might have been picked up originally by sailors visiting Polynesia, but theirs was an appropriation that left behind the cultural meaning of the form. In a tropical climate, with clothes at a minimum, tattoos replaced the language of clothing, indicating social hierarchies, replete with religious, genealogical, and tribal significance. Whatever one thinks about the body modification practices of warrior societies, today's tattoo art is very different from traditional *tatau*. Not the least of the differences is the unbounded character of the desire for more tattoos once the art form was separated from the cultural requirement that tattoos had

to be earned. This "ink addiction" is on display in full body tattoos: every inch of skin is inked, including the entire face (eyelids, lips), as well as the private parts of the body. In effect, the distinction between the public and private parts of the body disappears. Extreme tattooing is an attempt to deny human nakedness—to overwrite our original dispensation. It may be that the extreme version reveals something present in even the tiniest, most discreet tattoo: namely, the attempt to turn the body into a text, as if one's skin were a living parchment capable of bearing a hieroglyphic message. The verdict of Hebraic law was that the practice was idolatrous: "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I *am* the Lord" (Leviticus 19:28).

Even more radical (and less symbolic or logocentric) forms of body manipulation are being tried. The quest for ultimate "morphological freedom" is pushing well beyond the male/female divide. It takes two directions: either blurring the man/beast divide, or the man/machine divide. For instance, some trans-humans have their tongues split to be forked like a lizard's. Some implant horns or tails. Meanwhile, would-be cyborgs have their own set of implants, from chips imbedded in the hand for keyless front door entry to LED lights surgically inserted under the skin in glowing patterns.

Unless we return to a more substantial notion of human nature, this mad quest for metamorphosis will continue. Mansfield reminds us that there is an alternative. There are forms of transcendence proper to us as embodied souls. There is, for instance, a way of transcending the sexual difference that begins by respecting it. If men are more likely to be courageous and women more likely to be moderate, and if marriage is a meeting of minds as well as bodies, then in that co-mingling, men and women—yes, the cisgender ones—can learn from one another. By coming to appreciate the qualities of the other, the virtues of each are modified and en-

larged. This is the grown-togetherness achieved in long and successful marriages. Marriage is one model of transcendence. There is another kind of transcendence as well, possible for those who develop that smallest but most divine element within our being, and whose perception of the whole takes in its gendered nature while transcending gender bias. One thinks of novelists like George Eliot and Henry James, philosophers like Aristotle, and thinkers like Harvey C. Mansfield who do justice to the fullness of humanity.

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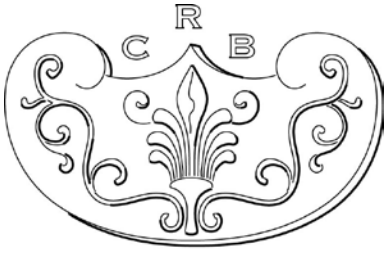

Book Review by Michael Knowles

Remembering the Answers

How to Save the West: Ancient Wisdom for 5 Modern Crises, by Spencer Klavan. Regnery Publishing, 256 pages, $29.99

Conservatives love little more than to lament the death of the West. Each year brings new books on the subject, almost all soon forgotten. A handful endure: Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1923) comes to mind, as does Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn To Decadence* (2000), and now, I'd wager, Spencer Klavan's *How To Save The West*. The associate editor of this journal, as well as the features editor for *The American Mind* and host of the *Young Heretics* podcast, Klavan might well outperform those two predecessors in educating and edifying the public. Unlike the sometimes inscrutable Spengler, Klavan writes in clear and eloquent prose, and unlike the venerable Barzun, he confines his vision of civilizational collapse to just a couple hundred pages. Best of all for an anxious modern audience, the author illuminates a path forward in our rapidly darkening times.

Klavan identifies five key modern crises: of reality, body, mean-

ing, religion, and regime. As technological wizards such as Mark Zuckerberg threaten to wrest us from the real world and thrust our minds into a "metaverse" of their own imaginations, we begin to wonder whether objective reality—"truth independent of authority, including the authority of 'experts' and of majority opinion"—even exists.

The virtual realities in which we now spend so much of our time exacerbate a long-festering sense of duality between our bodies and souls. Schizophrenic cultural elites compound the confusion with a pop ontology vacillating between materialism and gnosticism. They dispel our faith, hope, love, dreams, and moral intuitions with the scientific assurance that we are nothing more than atoms. Yet at the same time they belittle our bodies as relics of an ignorant age and urge us to transcend the physical world through fads such as transgenderism. If our bodies do not matter, then what do our perceptions mean? If only our bodies matter, how can anything mean anything at all?

This crisis of meaning leads us to question the very basics of human motivation: why do we think what we think, love what we love, and do what we do? Happily, on this problem, ancients and moderns seem to have reached the same conclusion: imitation. Thinkers as distinct as Plato, René Girard, and Richard Dawkins "agree that replication—the endless copying and reproduction of things—is a fundamental mechanism of the universe that governs everything from cells to empathy to human culture." But what, if anything, governs that process of replication? What, if anything, are we ultimately replicating?

Klavan does not shrink, as do so many muddle-headed modern gurus, from the essential question: "All the good and noble things we want to fight for," he explains, "can't exist

unless God does." Modern materialists have attempted to avoid the logical necessity of God's existence by concocting scientific theories based on pure imagination. The "multiverse," a popular theory that posits multiple or infinite worlds, seems to fill the gap left by presuming God away. But there is nothing new under the sun in our singular cosmos, as Klavan reminds his readers by quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, who considered and refuted the notion of the multiverse in the *Summa Theologiae* more than four centuries before modern scientists flattered themselves into thinking that they had stumbled onto a novel idea.

Within the universe, we live in a particular place. The West, contrary to modern platitudes, is not just an idea; it is also a political community. The first four crises through which Klavan guides us culminate in a crisis of regime, though we cannot seem to agree on the cause. "Either our democracy is threatened by right-wing extremists who must be prosecuted—if not persecuted—with the full powers of the federal government," he observes, "or our society is melting down under the corrosive assaults of neo-Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and gender extremism." Neither can we agree about how to solve the problem: "Perhaps the solution is secession or localism, or perhaps it requires a massive extension of federal power, and more governors ruling by emergency decree as they did during the COVID crisis."

Klavan views the crisis of regime through the lens of various political philosophers including Plato, Polybius, Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Rudi Dutschke, and Patrick Deneen. But he doesn't abandon his reader to dry intellectual history. He recognizes that regimes survive on more than mere ideas. "In the end," he concludes, "it is *philia*—friendship, or love—that binds political communities

together." We find this ancient wisdom in the writing of Aristotle but also closer to home in the public addresses of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. The West is no mere abstraction, and neither will be its salvation. We are real people living in a real world, the author reminds us, and we can choose to live as if the truths and triumphs of our once-great civilization are real, too.

Klavan distinguishes himself not only by his wealth of knowledge and wisdom but also by his lack of pomp and pedantry. He quotes everyone from Herodotus to Kendrick Lamar, translating the texts himself—except in the case of Lamar, whom he regrettably leaves in the original—and yet this superb scholarly display might well pass unnoticed because he never shows off. Every line propels this beautiful, urgent book toward its purpose. The civilization is in crisis, people need answers, and *How to Save the West* provides them.

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Essay by William Voegeli

All the Lawns Are Brown

Crisis politics and the California drought.

"Ain't that something?" says the coroner in the 1974 movie *Chinatown*. "Middle of a drought, the water commissioner drowns—only in L.A." When nine "atmospheric river events" during the three weeks after Christmas 2022 brought California nearly as much precipitation as the state receives in an average year, no government officials lost their lives. But more than 20 residents perished, and the property damage from flooding exceeded $1 billion. Yet no sooner did the skies clear than authorities began reminding California residents that it remained imperative

Books mentioned in this essay:

Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950–1963, by Kevin Starr. Oxford University Press, 576 pages, $24.95 (paper)

Winning the Water Wars: California Can Meet Its Water Needs by Promoting Abundance Rather than Managing Scarcity, by Steven Greenhut. Pacific Research Institute, 385 pages, $29.99 (paper)

The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California, by Edward Ring. Amazon Digital Services, 225 pages, $17.95 (paper)

Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy, by Robert H. Wiebe. University of Chicago Press, 332 pages, $33 (paper)

Liberal Equality, by Amy Gutmann. Cambridge University Press, 332 pages, $34.99 (paper)

Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates One World, 176 pages, $26

Road to Survival, by William Vogt. William Sloane Associates, Inc., 356 pages, out-of-print

to "conserve water and make conservation a way of life." "California is experiencing—coincidentally—both a drought emergency and a flood emergency," said the Department of Water Resources director. Only in CA.

When a state is afflicted by too little water and too much water, simultaneously, one might suppose that the whole point of *having* a Department of Water Resources is to turn this coincidence into a happy one. California officials cannot protest that the challenge took them by surprise. *Chinatown*, set in the 1930s, dramatized how securing the benefits water bestows while mitigating the harms it inflicts has shaped California's history. In *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950–1963* (2009), historian Kevin Starr wrote that California "invented itself through water." The Gold Rush saw men grow rich by devising ingenious means for moving water "to, through, or across land." That technology was later modified to create irrigation systems that, by the end of the 19th century, turned California into an agricultural state. Subsequent elaborations, dams and aqueducts in particular, "metropolitanized Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area in the early decades of the twentieth century."

Later, in the middle of that century, federal and state officials were successful and sometimes audacious in addressing California's water needs. The Central Valley Project, approved in 1933, linked the northern Sacramento Valley region, where two thirds of the state's precipitation falls, to the San Joaquin Valley, where two thirds of the state's irrigable land is located. The project connected them by building 20 dams and reservoirs, eleven hydroelectric powerplants, and 500 miles of canals and tunnels. In 1960, spurred by Democratic governor Pat Brown, California launched the even more extensive State Water Project, described by Starr as "the most ambitious water storage and distribution system in the

history of the human race." Its 21 dams and 705 miles of canals deliver water collected in northern California to 27 million residents and 750,000 acres of farmland.

The State Water Project system remains unfinished. Since the 1970s there has been more litigating and planning than building, despite the fact that California's population doubled between 1970 and 2020. Two recent books—*Winning the Water Wars* (2020) by journalist Steven Greenhut and *The Abundance Choice: Our Fight for More Water in California* (2022) by Edward Ring of the California Policy Center—argue that the cycle of droughts and floods owes less to capricious nature than to failed governance. The "core problem," writes Greenhut, is that California policy has come to emphasize "boosting fish populations" over meeting residents' and farmers' needs. Indeed, it has come to *favor* water scarcity as "a means to limit growth and force changes in the way we live." He believes that the key component of a successful policy is expanding water storage throughout the state, both above and below the earth's surface, so that rainfall and snowmelt is preserved for future use, rather than draining into the Pacific Ocean or overflowing riverbanks.

Beyond that, Greenhut calls for an "all of the above" approach to making water available and directing it to its most pressing needs. For both writers, "all of the above" includes—as a component rather than the entirety of a solution—desalinating ocean water. (California has an 840-mile coastline, America's longest after Alaska and Florida.) They point to Israel, with less than one fourth of California's population and located in one of the world's driest regions, which has five desalination plants and is on track to get 90% of its water from the Mediterranean Sea.

California presently has twelve desalination plants in operation but, despite constant warnings that the latest drought is the worst

in state—if not human—history, has been notably ambivalent about adding more. In May 2022 the California Coastal Commission voted 11-0 to reject a new plant in Orange County that would have provided 50 million gallons of water a day, enough to provide for 460,000 residents' needs. As Edward Ring noted in *National Review*, the Poseidon Water company had, over a 24-year period, spent $100 million on the application for the plant. Much of that time and money, he notes, produced "seemingly endless studies and redesigns as the Coastal Commission and other agencies continued to change the requirements." Despite these efforts, and the fact that Poseidon had been operating a similar desalination plant in neighboring San Diego County since 2015, the commission's board followed its staff's recommendation: to reject the project for economic and environmental reasons. One audience member at the hearing wore a green hat and carried a sign that read, "I am a plankton, please do not kill me!"

Learned Fecklessness

Californians, directed to make conservation a way of life, may fairly ask why responsiveness and competency cannot be made a way of government. According to a 2019 fact sheet on "Water Value in California" published by the Public Policy Institute of California, the state's residents have already grown increasingly efficient about using water. A mere 10% of California's water consumption is "urban," i.e., for residences and businesses. For those purposes, Californians in 1990 consumed 231 gallons per day, per person, a figure that fell to 180 gallons in 2010 and 146 in 2015. Another 40% is devoted to agriculture, which is also getting more bang for the bucket. As a result of conservation and planting less thirsty crops, "[f]arm production generated 38% more

gross state product in 2015 than in 1980, even though farm water use was about 14% lower." The remaining 50% of water use is "environmental": rivers protected as "wild and scenic" under law, water used to maintain habitat within streams or to support wetlands within wildlife preserves, and water needed to maintain water quality for farms and homes.

The simplest explanation for the Golden State's water policy failures is that they are just one more instance of the learned recklessness that has beset California's public sector. A state that once amazed the world with its freeways and bridges has now wasted 15 years and $10 billion building a high-speed rail system that, according to its original directors, may never carry a single passenger. The more money the state, counties, and cities spend to prevent homeless people from sleeping on sidewalks and in parks, the worse the problem gets. There appears to be no public responsibility so basic, down to thwarting shoplifters and reckless drivers, that California government hasn't lost the ability or will to discharge it.

And yet, there's more to the story than ineptitude. "I'll believe it's a crisis when the people who keep telling me it's a crisis start acting like it's a crisis," is the phrase coined by law professor and Instapundit blogger Glenn Reynolds. He and others who wield it often zero in on the disconnect between public figures' rhetoric and their private actions. Former vice president Al Gore, for example, is the most prominent global-warming Cassandra but also the owner of a 10,000-square-foot Nashville home that uses 34 times as much electricity as the average American residence. The electricity required to heat just its outdoor swimming pool exceeds the amount six typical households consume for all purposes.

Hypocrisy is not the worst of it, though. The more fundamental inconsistency that deserves our scorn is when crisis mongers' warnings do not match their *public* actions. Citizens, in other words,

have every right to complain if the people who keep telling us it's a crisis preside over a government response that, instead of being focused and urgent, is incremental, diffuse, irresolute, and languid. In 2018 69% of Los Angeles County voters approved Measure W, a ballot proposition to raise property taxes for the purpose of improving facilities that capture and treat water. With nearly 10 million residents, a population more than one fourth of California's, and exceeding that of all but the ten most populous states, L.A. County does not have the luxury of failing in slight and inconsequential ways. Yet the *Los Angeles Times* found that, as of March 2022, the county had collected $556 million as a result of the ballot proposition but disbursed only $95.5 million of the new revenues. And, given that "actual construction had lagged well behind the money disbursed…it could take half a century to complete the work." One former county official told the paper, "Part of the problem is that we don't have a plan and we are saying to voters give us the money and we will figure it out later."

The payoff from the increased taxes will not only arrive in a more distant future than the voters were led to expect but will take a very different form. In particular, the *Times* reported, "Storm capture projects appear to be a low priority." Discerning newspaper readers will infer that Measure W had the key elements of a bait-and-switch scam. Votes were secured on the promise of addressing the public's greatest concern: drought relief through enhanced rainfall and snowmelt capture. But the wording revealed, to the handful of voters who worked through it, that W's revenues would be available for a range of water-related purposes, and that the priorities would ultimately reflect officials' preferences rather than the public's. "[W]hatever voters thought," the *Times* concludes, "new water resources are not the main focus of the Measure W process."

Never Let a Crisis Go to Waste

This disingenuous approach to crisis management is neither new nor unique to California. In 1910 the philosopher William James lamented that, throughout history, "war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community." He looked forward, though, to a time when the "moral equivalent of war" will "inflame the civic temper as past history has inflamed the military temper." All that is needed to attain "that higher social plane…of service and cooperation" is "skillful propagandism" and "opinion-making men seizing historic opportunities."

Franklin Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression followed this template. If Congress failed to pass legislation necessary to meet the crisis, FDR warned in his First Inaugural Address, he would ask it for "broad Executive power to wage war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe." In Roosevelt's interpretation of his electoral mandate, the people wanted "direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership."

In 1977 Jimmy Carter appropriated William James's phrase directly when, in a national address during his presidency's third month, he said that "the greatest challenge that our country will face during our lifetime"—the energy crisis—was the "moral equivalent of war." The alternative to enacting his energy proposals, Carter warned, "may be a national catastrophe." In his notorious "malaise speech" two years later—one of the strangest addresses in presidential history—Carter subsumed the energy crisis, along with Congress's and the people's failure to take most of the steps he had called for, under a more fundamental "crisis of confidence," manifested in "the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation." He ex-

pressed the hope that solving the energy crisis would alleviate the spiritual one: "It can rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose." Carter's defeat in November 1980 is the best evidence that he never effected the societal discipline James and Roosevelt had called for, in large measure because he was no match for FDR in the realm of "skillful propagandism."

The most unguarded explication of crisis politics came from Rahm Emanuel during an interview in November 2008, days after President-elect Barack Obama had announced that the Illinois congressman would become chief of staff for his new administration: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." Why not? Because, Emanuel explained, a crisis presents "an opportunity to do things that you think you could not do before." He cited the energy crisis that had gotten the best of Carter as an example of such squandering: America "missed the opportunity" to enact ambitious measures by settling on an energy policy that "came down to cheap oil."

The least charitable interpretation of Rahm's Law is that it directs politicians to exploit a crisis by taking advantage of the people's fear and confusion to implement measures that opponents would ordinarily thwart. The Democratic Party, of course, wants the government to do many things it is not now doing, while Republicans think the federal government's present workload already exceeds its capabilities and legitimate authority. It makes sense, then, that Republicans heard Emanuel urging Democrats to treat a crisis like the financial one in 2008 as a *pretext* to enact policies that would otherwise be non-starters, including ones tenuously related to the crisis they purport to address. After all, Emanuel went on to list Obama agenda items that were clearly germane to the financial crisis, such as fiscal, tax, and regulatory policy—but also said that 2008 had opened the door for the new administration's

bold initiatives in health care, energy, and education.

An alternative interpretation, probably closer to Emanuel's own understanding, is that a politician who lets a crisis go to waste is like a physician whose remedies alleviate the patient's symptoms but do nothing to cure the underlying disease. Cheap oil, in this view, addressed the most obvious manifestation of the energy crisis: gasoline that was expensive and sometimes unavailable. But if you believe that the energy crisis was really about America achieving self-sufficiency through the development of domestic energy sources cleaner and more secure than OPEC imports, then a steep decline in the global price of oil was a setback. Once beleaguered consumers concluded that the crisis was over, they lost interest in more fundamental changes.

Even if one stipulates that Democrats are acting in good faith when they make sure that a crisis doesn't go to waste, there are complications. One is strictly governmental: justifying an ambitious agenda on the basis of a crisis is only as valid as the diagnosis of the crisis is accurate. If, in fact, the problem to be addressed is not particularly grave, and can be resolved by limited reforms rather than comprehensive ones, "letting a crisis go to waste" is a hyperbolic way to deplore *solving* it. Thus, the difficulty for Emanuel's argument is that, despite enacting very few of the energy policies that Jimmy Carter had said were imperative, the nation ended up suffering very little of the devastation that Carter had said was imminent.

Crisis and Democracy

Ideally, government leaders would perfectly assess *every* challenge facing the nation, neither understating nor overstating its dangers. In a republic, where officials who are not philosopher-kings derive their power from the consent of the governed,

the problem is not just governmental but political. The range of politically feasible policy options—what has come to be called the "Overton Window"—is determined by what the public will reject and accept. These impermanent boundaries can be shifted by new facts, such as cars queueing up around gas stations in the 1970s or the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank in 2008, but also by rhetoric—opinion-making, as William James called it. Precisely because a crisis affords elected leaders the latitude to do things that they could not do before, they are strongly tempted to sound the crisis alarm every time they are stymied by political opposition or inertia.

It is a tactic that carries dangers, for the politician and the country. The people may experience crisis fatigue, either because they doubt that the situation really is as dire as they have been told, or because they suspect that the decision-makers, reluctant to surrender their power to do things that they couldn't do before, are refusing to give an all-clear signal when it becomes warranted by changing circumstances. Jimmy Carter's declining approval ratings during his four-year term reflected, in part, the self-inflicted credibility problem he created with overwrought claims that the energy crisis was a clear and present danger to the nation's existence.

The broader threat, implied by FDR's First Inaugural, is that crisis politics may lead to saving democracy, or at least claiming to save it, by curtailing or suspending democracy. It, too, is a seduction that could become an addiction. In 2010 *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman made the unfortunate choice to think out loud on NBC's *Meet the Press* about how, if America "could just be China for a day," we "could actually…authorize the right solutions…on everything from the economy to [the] environment." He hastened to add that he didn't really want America

to become China, not even "for a second." What he wanted, rather, was for our democracy to "work with the same authority, focus and stick-to-itiveness" as an authoritarian government, rather than continue to be one that never generates anything besides "suboptimal solutions."

Political theorist Matthew Crawford reminds us that the widely held belief that liberalism and democracy are good things can lead us to forget that they are distinct things, ones that can be difficult to reconcile. As it was originally understood, liberalism embodied the idea that the state's purpose, to secure people's inalienable rights, required government to be limited in its aims and claims. For more than a century now, this original version has retreated in the face of a more expansively conceived liberalism that calls on activist government to secure people's well-being. Liberalism, in this understanding, requires social welfare programs, income redistribution, and extensive regulations.

Liberals of the second type were optimistic that democracy would give their project practical support and moral validation. Everybody loves Santa Claus, so a government committed to devising more ways to give more things to more people should enjoy ever increasing popularity. "We will spend and spend, and tax and tax, and elect and elect," is the formula attributed to New Dealer Harry Hopkins. Further, activist government was not only upheld by democracy but, in turn, upheld democracy. As Franklin Roosevelt often said, "Necessitous men are not free men." The loss of "economic security and independence" brought on by the Great Depression was, in Roosevelt's interpretation, *the* cause for the rise of the fascism that had plunged the world into war. "People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made."

The Liberal-Democracy Hyphen

The post-New Deal era's disappointments and frustrations made it increasingly important, but also increasingly difficult, for Democrats to "strengthen the hyphen in 'liberal-democracy,'" to quote Crawford, writing for the online journal *UnHerd*. The elect-and-elect formula becomes unreliable when taxes rise, as they did during the unlegislated bracket-creep increases of the 1970s. At the same time, government spending was prodigious but ineffectual, as Great Society programs failed to deliver their promised transformations.

It also gets harder to win elections when the activist state acquires a public image that is less like Santa Claus and more like Nurse Ratched: patiently, insistently, incessantly telling you to fasten your seatbelt, drive 55, remove your shoes before going through airport security, don't use plastic straws, step out of the bar and stand on the sidewalk if you insist on smoking, wear your mask, get vaccines and boosters, lower your thermostat, replace your gas stoves, and water your lawn no more than once a week and for no more than ten minutes at a time. These interventions left many Americans feeling that liberalism's supply of discipline and direction greatly exceeded the demand for it. As journalist Josh Barro warned liberals in 2017 in *Business Insider*, "All this scolding—this messaging that you should feel guilty about aspects of your life that you didn't think were anyone else's business—leads to a weird outcome when you go to vote in November."

The malaise speech can be read as a garbled attempt to strengthen the liberal-democracy hyphen. Carter had campaigned in 1976 as a populist, promising America "a government as good as its people." There was, then, a tortured consistency in choosing to explain his administration's setbacks as a conse-

quence of the American people being screwed up in ways Carter had not previously realized.

More sophisticated attempts to reconcile activist government with democracy were advanced by brigades of intellectuals in the late 20th century. Their argument was that even as progressive theorists at the beginning of the 20th century had made the happy discovery that liberalism not only permitted but required activist government, subsequent deliberations had also revealed that democracy, rightly understood, mandated the very same thing. In *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (1995), historian Robert H. Wiebe chronicles how theorists had come to favor "true," "genuine," or "real" democracy over the mere democracy of representation and accountability. He cites as one example *Liberal Equality* (1980) by political scientist Amy Gutmann, who argued that "universal welfare rights and a relatively equal distribution of income," along with many other entitlements, were not policy goals but preconditions of political legitimacy. In such a framework, Wiebe says, "governments are largely administrative, and elections ritual."

Stolen-Base Politics

In the 21st century, the tension between the Democrats and the *demos* has grown so acute as to have become a crisis of its own. Eighty-year-old Joe Biden has described himself as a "bridge" to his party's rising generation. But the younger activists working in and on the party bring from their training on radicalized college campuses a vocabulary and viewpoint that baffle and offend more voters than they attract. A 2021 Pew Research Center poll found that Democratic respondents under the age of 30 were the only group where a majority (55%) preferred the idea that other coun-

tries are better than the U.S. to the alternatives that America is either the best or one of the best nations in the world. Overall, 23% of all respondents called America the greatest country in the world, compared to 5% of under-30 Democrats.

What is true in general of a cohort defined by age and party affiliation applies particularly to the "opinion-making men" (and women, and nonbinaries) in politics, journalism, academia, and non-profits who are the avatars of 21st-century liberalism. For them, it's not just that the U.S. is not the best country but that it, and Western civilization more broadly, is singularly bad: racist, misogynistic, and rapacious. The idea is not new, but its progress from the fringes of leftist thinking toward the core of the Democratic Party is. It was in 1967 that literary critic Susan Sontag argued in *Partisan Review* that America, a nation "founded on a genocide," had become "the culmination of Western white civilization." The problem, as she saw it, is that

> [t]he white race *is* the cancer of human history; it is the white race and it alone—its ideologies and inventions—which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself.

Even in the turmoil of 1967, driven by war in Vietnam and race riots in big cities, this opinion was considered outré. But by 2015, when a *New York Times* critic hailed *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates as "essential, like water or air," the Sontag thesis had achieved wider currency. Coates made the same link in his book between America's crimes against humanity and its crimes against nature. The nightmarish American Dream plunders "not just the bodies of humans but the body of the Earth

itself," he wrote. The way of life that "endangers the planet" is the same one that consigns African Americans to "prisons and ghettos."

As Crawford writes, "a shared political morality that sacralizes the victim" is the connective tissue that turns revulsion at these discrete outrages into a "shared political morality." (I am a plankton, please do not kill me!) In a 2012 *Wall Street Journal* interview, Harvey Mansfield said that progressivism began as an "alliance of experts and victims." The alliance now includes a third party. Its members are, in Crawford's words, "those with the moral sensitivity to see victimization where it may not be apparent, and who make this capacity a touchstone of their identity." The sensitive can be counted on to demand, in the name of the victims, deference to the experts. "Follow the science!" Thus characterized, those who oppose or are even dubious about the progressive agenda are necessarily stupid (insolent toward experts), wicked (callous toward victims), or both.

The day may come when strident rhetoric, modeled on Coates's and Sontag's, catalyzes a dominant electoral majority. But the toxicity of "defund the police" in the 2020 election argues that this day will not arrive soon. In the meantime, activists who share that worldview will be tempted to secure otherwise unattainable policy victories by never letting any crisis go to waste. The moral equivalent of war not only inflames the civic temper but allows the inflamed to berate uninflamed doubters as the disloyal opposition, a fifth column.

One year ago *The Atlantic*'s Ed Yong, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his work on COVID, told another journalist, Sam Adler-Bell, that he covered the pandemic from the start as "an opportunity to take stock of societal problems that have been allowed to go unaddressed for too long." Writing in *New York* magazine, Adler-Bell

elaborated the point, calling COVID "an X-ray of the dysfunction and rot in our social order." It had made clear the need for "the child tax credit, universal health care, investments in schools and hospitals, and alleviating poverty." Accordingly, he said, the debates about COVID—when to end lockdowns, resume in-person public schooling, modify or drop mask requirements—"are as much about how we should *regard* all this suffering as they are about how we may prevent it."

Replying in his online newsletter, Josh Barro called this approach to keeping the pandemic crisis from going to waste a flagrant case of "stolen-base politics." Though people acquiesced in temporary departures from normal life during COVID, "[a]t no point, anywhere along the line, was there significant buy-in for the idea that we were going to permanently change the social contract." The base-stealing involved skipping the step where the public was supposed to be *persuaded* that a Green New Deal was exactly the remedy needed to fix and redeem our rotten, dysfunctional social order. Persuasion is hard and humbling, requiring you to meet voters where they are in order to move them closer to where you think they should be. Far easier to declare that, because a crisis has rendered politics a luxury we can't afford, we have no choice but to "trust the experts." It helps when the experts just happen to share your political worldview, but then hurts when the experts go on to issue contradictory directives supposedly derived from "settled science." "[M]asks at the host stand, but not at your table," Barro observes. "Or, masks, but not on the faces of public officials ordering that they be worn. Or, stay home, unless you're protesting for a cause we agree with." Such arbitrary orders "made a farce of the idea that the rules are written and enforced by people 'following the science.'"

Ecocentrism vs. Anthropocentrism

California's drought is a difficult, pressing, complex policy challenge. As a *political* problem, though, it is best understood as a debate about how to regard California's water needs rather than about how to meet them. Some, such as Steven Greenhut and Edward Ring, have no desire to censure or dismantle the vision of the good life that defined California during its post-World War II age of abundance. In this view, smart infrastructure programs, worthy successors to Pat Brown's California Water Project, could supply all the water needed by thriving farms in the Central Valley and suburban families living in single-family homes with backyard pools and lush lawns.

The opposing environmentalist viewpoint treats California's water scarcity as a reality to be accommodated, not a problem to be solved. The drought results from "excessive and unsustainable demand for water in our state," Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council wrote on the organization's blog. Droughts and floods, "the new normal of climate whiplash," in Obegi's words, are not only the result of global warming but nature's fitting rebuke for our abuse of the planet. Greenhut's *Winning the Water Wars* points out that in the late 1800s conservationist John Muir urged California to construct reservoirs "so that all the bounty of the mountains may be put to use." By 1992, the Sierra Club felt it necessary to reproach its founder for such a "strong anthropocentric component" in his writing, different from, and inferior to, the "ecocentric thinking" animating the modern environmentalist movement. The point when conservationism turned toward ecocentrism, and an aesthetic rejection of industrial civilization engendered a moral judgment and then a political crusade, came with ecologist William Vogt's bestselling *Road to Survival* (1948). "Our forefathers [were] one of

the most destructive groups of human beings that have ever raped the earth," it thundered. "They moved into one of the richest treasure houses ever opened to man, and in a few decades turned millions of acres of it into a shambles."

It is likely, even in heavily Democratic California, that the anthropocentric, all-of-the-above agenda of water abundance is more popular than the ecocentric ideal of perpetuating scarcity as a way to gradually supplant modern civilization with austerity. But, to rework a maxim ascribed to Stalin, how the people vote is less important than how their votes are interpreted, implemented, and litigated.

Californians' desire for more water is clear…and hasn't made much difference. California has not increased its reservoir capacity since 1980. County and state referenda to increase the water supply serve other purposes but take years, or decades, to further the voters' main goal. The years, millions of dollars, and uncertain outcome of running the environmental-impact maze not only defeat some projects that would increase the water supply, but serve as an example that prevents many other prospective innovators from taking the first steps. Backstopping all these impediments is the constant threat and frequent reality of lawsuits by environmental groups that prolong water-abundance projects' construction, increase their costs, and reduce the number completed or even attempted. "Because the Earth Needs a Good Lawyer," is the motto of one environmental group, Earth Justice, but describes the *modus operandi* of the burgeoning environmentalist industry.

This determination to work the system, to turn political defeats into policy victories, is unfair but not unprincipled. From the environmentalist perspective, democracy's central failing is its anthropocentrism. People vote and plankton don't. To ascend to ecocentric justice, politics must be made more bureaucratic and judicial,

but less democratic. The millions of species and natural wonders cannot protect themselves against plundering humans. These victims need experts to ensure their safety. It would appear that California will not again enjoy abundant water until America reclaims robust democracy.

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Book Review by Julius Krein

Designed in California, Made in China

Slouching Towards Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century, by J. Bradford DeLong. Basic Books, 624 pages, $35

The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era, by Gary Gerstle. Oxford University Press, 432 pages, $27.95

More than a decade after the 2008 financial crisis, proclamations of the death of neoliberalism have become cliché, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that neoliberalism remains the dominant mode of political economy in the West. Neoliberalism, to offer a simple definition, seeks to maximize the free movement of capital, goods, and labor, and prefers the insulation of economic institutions from political influence or direction. Although there has been a modest reversal of globalization and a revived focus on securing supply chains in recent years, the neoliberal paradigms of the 1990s and 2000s still shape our world. Neoliberalism is not dead, merely disliked. And even if few on the Left or Right embrace the neoliberal label or its policy legacy today, there is no agreed-upon replacement.

Two new books seek to make sense of this confusing situation. The first, J. Bradford DeLong's *Slouching Towards Utopia*, is a progressive neoliberal's attempt to grapple with the economic policy failures of recent decades without abandoning the underlying neoliberal framework. The second, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order* by Gary Gerstle, a left-wing critic of neoliberalism, emphasizes the historical contingencies that drove both the rise and fall of the New Deal political economy and the trajectory of its neoliberal successor. Gerstle's book, in particular, contains many valuable insights, yet both stumble when explaining the present political-economic impasse, and neither offers a way out of it.

A better title for DeLong's book would be *Slouching Towards an Argument*. His 600-page tome covers everything from Clinton White House gossip to the battlefield tactics of the Wehrmacht. These disparate parts do not always add up to a whole but, with some interpretive effort, a few recurring leitmotifs can be identified.

DeLong underscores the continuities of economic history. "History does not repeat itself," he writes, "but it does rhyme." As if to

both reinforce and contradict this claim, DeLong repeats the phrase verbatim, and ad nauseam, throughout the book. The "long twentieth century," which he identifies as 1870 to 2010, however, stands out as uniquely successful in escaping Malthusian scarcity, thanks to the combination of globalization, innovation, and social democracy (generous welfare programs along with inclusive democratic representation). His book's narrative drama is provided by the philosophical conflict between economists Friedrich Hayek and Karl Polanyi, whom DeLong uses as avatars of the eternal antagonism between market dynamism and communal solidarity. The moral of the story is that "professional economists" like DeLong are needed to moderate this undergraduate-level debate and find the proper balance required for peace and prosperity. The post-World War II "shotgun marriage of Friedrich von Hayek and Karl Polanyi, blessed by John Maynard Keynes," was "as good as we have so far gotten," he writes.

DeLong's own intellectual journey figures into his chapters covering recent decades. In his early career, which included a stint as deputy assistant secretary of the treasury in the Clinton Administration, DeLong acquired a reputation as a leading neoliberal Democrat. More recently, he has repudiated some of these commitments. *Slouching Towards Utopia* contains DeLong's accounting of the policy errors underwritten by neoliberal thought, and his regret that more progressive alternatives were not pursued. But it is precisely in his criticism of neoliberalism that DeLong reveals his fundamental attachment to its basic conceptual framework—and shows why it has been so difficult for the centrist establishment to break from failed policy models.

For DeLong, moving away from neoliberalism means adopting a bit more welfare and regulation—a little more "Polanyi" and a little less "Hayek." But these abstractions ob-

scure essential questions: Is the Hayekian market the sole source of innovation and growth? Is the Polanyian political community merely something one must make occasional concessions to in order to avoid extremist backlash? Do the market and state function as opposites in a simplistic binary? DeLong seems to think the only important debate is over the size and scope of welfare and regulatory programs. Yet what if the state's role is not confined to wealth redistribution; what if it is also critical to technological advance and economic growth?

These questions point toward the glaring contradiction at the heart of DeLong's worldview. He sees globalization, innovation, and social democracy as the keys to success in the long 20th century and beyond. But he never really reflects on the inherent conflicts between them.

The tensions between globalization and social democracy have received more attention in recent years (see, *inter alia*, the work of Michael Lind, Wolfgang Streeck, Michael Pettis, and Thomas Fazi) as they have become increasingly obvious. The further globalization proceeds, the greater the ability of multinational corporations and finance to undercut labor through offshoring, trade, and immigration, as well as to avoid taxation and to undermine social contracts generally. DeLong, however, does not seriously engage with these issues. He sees contemporary globalization as a fait accompli brought about by container shipping and internet communications, and he blames the decline of Western welfare states on bad-faith Republicans and well-meaning Democrats. But regarding how to build or sustain a robust social democracy amid the race-to-the-bottom pressures of globalization, DeLong has nothing to say.

A less discussed, though perhaps more significant, tension exists between globalization and innovation. Peter Thiel offered the most succinct articulation of this conflict in his book *Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future* (2014), in which he posited globalization (going from 1 to *n*) and innovation (going from 0 to 1) as opposites. Sociologist Liah Greenfeld provided a more academic treatment in *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (2001), which explored the interconnections between capitalist development and nationalist rivalry from the early modern period through the 20th century. A more recent scholarly literature (see, for example, the work of Mariana Mazzucato and Robyn Klingler-Vidra) has shown how national innovation efforts—often motivated by geopolitical exigencies—have been central to technological breakthroughs and the formation of high-tech industries, as in the cases of Israel, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and China, not to mention America's Manhattan Project, Apollo space program, and early Silicon Valley.

DeLong, by contrast, struggles to explain why the magic of globalization has consistently failed to lift all boats, particularly countries in the Global South. He blames overly strong states, corruption, and lack of democracy. Yet China's remarkable rise (to take only the most prominent counterexample) has occurred under an authoritarian state with no shortage of corruption. A less ideological analysis would acknowledge the importance of state-led national development strategies and the centrality of industrialization. Countries with the state capacity and political will to pursue such strategies (such as the "Four Asian Tigers") have succeeded in joining the developed world. Those which cannot, which rely on liberal economists to find the perfect balance between Hayek and Polanyi—employing the state only to redistribute wealth—have fared much worse.

DeLong is too polite to mention, or perhaps too ideologically blinkered to observe, that globalization is at bottom a euphemism for imperial expansion—though he comes close when he awkwardly pairs globalization with American exceptionalism at one point in the book. This was as true for ancient Rome and *Siglo de Oro* Spain as it was for Victorian Britain and the "end of history" United States. It is probably unfair to say that (neo)liberal economic thought itself is merely a justification of empire, but the fact that its popularity tends to follow imperial fortunes is not especially surprising. Despite liberalism's rhetorical emphasis on dynamism, the belief that markets bring about perfect outcomes offers a convenient rationalization of the status quo. Yet as the economist Albert O. Hirschman recognized, faith in the invisible hand tends to be more debilitating for the hegemon than its challengers, as it prevents a response to the economic nationalist strategies of rising competitors which consciously exploit global market arrangements. Consequently, while the financial sector of the imperial center inflates, its underlying industrial and technological advantages erode. Such was the case for Great Britain vis-à-vis Germany and the United States in the early 20th century, and for the United States vis-à-vis China in the early 21st.

When "the scientific pretensions of these ideologies have been exploded," James Burnham wrote in *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (1941), they are revealed as "at best just temporary expressions of the interests and ideals of a particular class of men at a particular historical time." So it is with *Slouching Towards Utopia*. DeLong's book is not a serious work of political economy or a coherent history of the long 20th century. It is rather a long and rambling apologia for the "end of history," on the one hand, and "professional economists," on the other. It shows that even if the long 20th century has ended, the ideological

chimeras of the long 1990s still survive, zombie-like, in the minds of neoliberal economists. The book's combination of globalization, innovation, and social democracy is utopian because it can never be sustained, as its internal contradictions prove self-undermining. Today, those contradictions should be obvious. But whether or not history rhymes, DeLong seems doomed to continue repeating his mistakes.

While DeLong traces the contours of the long 20th century, Gary Gerstle focuses on the short version extending from 1917 to 1991, the duration of the Soviet Union. Indeed, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order* is primarily about the impacts of the rise and fall of the Soviet Union on U.S. domestic politics.

For Gerstle, the existence of a genuine alternative to Communism was essential to both the creation of the New Deal order and its unraveling. It was precisely the threat posed by Communism, in Gerstle's account, that motivated capitalist nations to construct social democratic institutions and lay the foundations of postwar mass prosperity. In addition to industrial and technological rivalry, the Cold War featured an intense competition between capitalist and Communist societies over which could deliver a better standard of living for the common man, as exemplified by the 1959 "Kitchen Debate" between Vice President Richard Nixon and the USSR's Nikita Khrushchev. Without such external pressure, Gerstle argues, the United States might never have left the Gilded Age political economy that characterized the pre-New Deal era and arose again soon after the Cold War.

At the same time, the effort to contain the Soviet Union abroad slowly weakened the foundations of U.S. economic power. In order to support its allies, America granted them privileged access to the

U.S. consumer market while allowing countries like Germany and Japan to maintain high tariffs. Initially, when the U.S. industrial colossus towered over war-ravaged economies, these asymmetries had little domestic impact. But over time the resulting foreign industrial competition—combined with spending on both Vietnam and the Great Society, as well as the peaking of U.S. oil production—precipitated a balance of payments crisis and made the New Deal era's high taxes and strong unions harder for the U.S. corporate sector to bear. Already in 1971, Gerstle recounts, "a blue-ribbon panel appointed by Nixon reported that 'the nation's economic superiority was gone.'" The breakdown in the 1970s of the Bretton-Woods currency regime established in 1944 would have massive implications, while Wall Street grew increasingly unhappy with a falling stock market, small business chafed at expanding regulatory intrusions, and consumers wearied of inflation and gas lines.

Gerstle's analysis of the material factors behind the New Deal order's decline is compelling, if not especially original. The book's greatest insights, however, lie in its treatment of the multifaceted ideological motives behind the rise of neoliberalism. Countless leftist polemics, along with many hagiographies of Reagan, have presented neoliberalism as a decidedly right-wing affair, yet it always included left-wing currents. Gerstle is not the first author to explore Left neoliberalism, but his examination of it is perhaps the most penetrating and systematic, and his discussion of the convergence between Left and Right neoliberal frameworks is perhaps the most illuminating.

Gerstle identifies two neoliberal outlooks—one he terms the "neo-Victorian," and the other the "cosmopolitan"—which complement and conflict with each other at different points. Neo-Vic-

torianism is the moral code of Right neoliberalism, emphasizing virtues like self-reliance, hard work, and "law and order," as well as certain traditional expressions of civic and familial obligation. Gerstle mainly sees neo-Victorianism as a value system promoted by Right neoliberals in order to sustain the market—to ensure individuals remain fit for participation in it. But significantly, many conservative neoliberals argued that the market would also help sustain traditional values—William F. Buckley, Jr.'s fusionism in a nutshell. Cosmopolitanism, by contrast, is the left-wing variant of neoliberal morality. It emphasizes multiculturalism, self-expression, and choice—John Stuart Mill's "experiments in living"—less market discipline and efficiency and more the fluidity of market society. Gerstle identifies figures like Michel Foucault and the 1960s New Left as its leading intellectual influences.

Gerstle deftly traces these dynamics across presidential administrations and intellectual movements. At times, Left and Right neoliberals participated in intentional collaborations, such as *A New History of Leviathan: Essays on the Rise of the American Corporate State* (1972), a volume coedited by Murray Rothbard and Ronald Radosh that featured prominent New Left and libertarian contributors. In other cases, the convergence was more coincidental: Robert Bork and Ralph Nader were both consumer welfare enthusiasts; diehard Reaganites and ex-hippies celebrated the Silicon Valley "new economy" and its ethos; Chicago school economists and radical feminists attacked traditional views of the family; Left and Right radicals despised bureaucracy. Another important example not mentioned is the marketization of electric utilities, a favored cause of both countercultural greens and libertarian economists (along with Enron). Amid this backdrop, the Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and both Bush administrations

advanced overlapping neoliberal policies on trade, financial deregulation, immigration, antitrust, and beyond, even while cultural polarization between cosmopolitans and neo-Victorians intensified.

Gerstle identifies the George W. Bush Administration as the high point of neoliberalism. The disastrous economic and foreign policy choices of that period require no elaboration here, but Gerstle captures another important element of neoliberal politics: the total opposition to even the most basic forms of strategic planning. This tendency was evident in the administration's economic policy—including the view that financial market participants would "self-regulate"—but it also manifested, catastrophically, in foreign policy. As Gerstle explains,

> Bush ordered no one to develop a serious plan for reconstructing the Iraqi economy and society.... There was no need, in Bush's eyes, for the U.S. government to undertake such a reconstruction. The market, once suitably activated, would do that work.

On this point, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order* could have benefited from the insights of another recently published history, Fritz Bartel's *The Triumph of Broken Promises* (2022). Bartel argues that neoliberalism provided a critical technocratic and "scientific" rationale for austerity in the 1970s and '80s (one unavailable to the Eastern Bloc). The longer-term problem, however, is that the rationalizations for breaking imprudent campaign promises could also be used to excuse bad government and general incompetence. As economist Aaron Renn observed, if government is always the problem, never the solution, then why should politicians be held accountable for governance failures? Why should they even bother with basic elements of statesmanship, like sound planning and

execution? Politics becomes a game of focus-grouped slogans and moralism; the heavy lifting is left to the invisible hand.

As brilliant as Gerstle's account of the rise of neoliberalism is, his explanation of its fall is underwhelming. This is partly because neoliberalism hasn't quite fallen, but Gerstle also gets bogged down in the personal psychologies of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, losing sight of larger political and economic forces.

The basic analytical framework Gerstle uses to explain the rise of neoliberalism, however, yields insights into today's peculiar stasis. If reports of the death of neoliberalism are greatly exaggerated, it is often because they refer only to the decline of the right-wing variant. This shift is real enough, but it doesn't encompass all of neoliberalism, as Gerstle outlines.

Although neo-Victorian neoliberalism could be harsh, its justifications were straightforward: it promised superior economic performance and strong traditional values. Since around 2000, though, the U.S. economy has been mired in "secular stagnation"—if not "Brazilianization"—punctuated by speculative booms and busts, with most gains accruing to an ever-narrower set of large capital holders. Meanwhile, in an era of "woke capital," ubiquitous pornography, pervasive drug use, and broken families, hardly anyone still believes that markets reliably uphold traditional values.

Contrary to innumerable leftist critiques, many on the Right do sincerely believe in traditional and patriotic virtues, and not just for the instrumental purpose of sustaining markets. In recent years, these social conservatives have led the Republican Party's turn toward "populism" and occasional breaks from neoliberal orthodoxy. Nevertheless, social conservatives (in any politically meaningful sense of the term) are a distinct and embattled minority—among

the populace and especially among the elite—in part because of neoliberalism's corrosive effects. Thus, despite a growing disaffection with the market, they remain wary of a more effective state, which they fear would be used against them. The Left has given them little reason to think otherwise. Pessimistic about their ability to influence power—unable to wrest control of the Republican Party, yet unable to leave it—they default to what might be called a "neoliberalism of fear." In the Reagan era, conservative neoliberalism had a positive justification; now, obstructionist efforts are often undertaken for their own sake.

Cosmopolitan or Left neoliberalism was perhaps always destined to win out over neo-Victorianism, if only because its criteria are much easier to satisfy. One can be a multiculturalist and an entrepreneur of the self even in a stagnant economy, and the particulars of this morality are always in flux. Over time, the Democratic Party has moved away from the triangulating policies of the Clinton Administration, but the Left as a whole has only progressed deeper into cosmopolitan moralism. The radical Left's egalitarian yearnings are not necessarily insincere, but its unyielding commitment to subjectivity and victimhood precludes any real social solidarity or state-building. Like the Right, the far Left now tends to define its goals in negative or oppositional terms: defund the police, abolish ICE, antifascism, antiracism. Today's self-proclaimed socialists represent a sort of anarchic and moralistic "Left Communism," which no less an authority than Vladimir Lenin called "an infantile disorder."

Having rejected the masses as hopelessly racist and reactionary, and abandoned national states for globalism, the locus of Left activism has shifted toward multinational corporations, elite universities, independent "expert" bureaucracies, and major phil-

anthropic foundations. Whatever its professed antipathy toward neoliberalism, the radical Left has come to depend primarily—if not entirely—upon these most neoliberal of institutions.

Hence, on both Right and Left today, the more radical the critics of neoliberal theory, the more they rely upon neoliberal institutions in practice. Neither can easily abandon neoliberalism's antidemocratic funding and organizational models nor its limits on state action. Centrists, likewise, fearful of both extremes, default to a failing status quo, though they have recently taken some important steps with legislation like the CHIPS and Inflation Reduction Acts.

On the other hand, both Gary Gerstle and Brad DeLong, for different reasons, downplay the "statist" elements of neoliberalism. Neoliberals, in contrast to pure libertarians, consciously recognize a role for the state in creating and sustaining markets. Left-wing critiques tend to emphasize disciplinary functions like the "carceral state," but another issue complicates the basic operation of the market mechanism itself: the contradiction between (neo)classical theory's assumptions about the incentives of capitalism and the political interests of individual capitalists.

In theory, capitalism tends toward perfect competition; in practice, the capitalist desires monopoly. Theory prescribes laissez-faire; the capitalist desires government favors and public sector contracts. Thus, as the corporate sector becomes more powerful under neoliberalism, firms become more effective at lobbying for subsidies, bailouts, and government spending that can be subcontracted to the private sector, not to mention accommodative monetary policy experiments. In other words, capitalists themselves become the most powerful and motivated proponents of (self-serving) government intervention. Resisting this interventionist impulse would require some countervailing power intent on maintaining

the conditions of perfect competition, along with a citizenry willing to endure economic pain in some cases (e.g., avoiding bailouts). Yet neoliberal policy undercuts any institutions that could resist corporate power, and neoliberal doctrine undermines the public spiritedness required to do so.

As a result, instead of textbook capitalism, neoliberal political economy tends toward a sort of corrupted corporatism—one with complex ties between the state and private sectors, as well as high industry concentration, yet no meaningful representation of the public interest. This corporate landscape is littered with companies that take advantage of lax antitrust and financial market incentives to become "too big to fail," only to also become thoroughly financialized, stagnant, and sclerotic—deeply intertwined with the state if not largely dependent on government subsidies and contracts.

At the same time, the disappearance of the great public projects of previous eras is not accompanied by the shrinking of the state, but by what the pseudonymous Wallace S. Moyle calls the "libertarianoid style" of government intervention: inefficient and opaque efforts to direct government funds to private actors to carry out public programs, such as subsidizing the purchase of private health insurance. This, says Moyle, "allows Democrats to expand the reach of government without having to increase state capacity. It allows Republicans to proclaim at once their compassion for a program's beneficiaries and their commitment to the free market. And it allows both parties to shower interest groups—from landlords to health insurers—with subsidies."

Both Gerstle and DeLong also underappreciate the significance of the rise of the virtual economy. Gerstle documents both Right and Left neoliberal cheerleading of internet technology, and the Democratic Party's conscious efforts to win

over Silicon Valley in the run-up to the 1996 Telecommunications Act. But neither author fully grasps the sea change effected by Silicon Valley's ascendance.

As far back as the Nixon Administration, as indicated, policymakers began to recognize the waning of U.S. economic dominance. Early neoliberal reforms—as well as ongoing protectionist efforts like Reagan's Plaza Accord and import restrictions—were aimed at solving these problems. Throughout the 1992 presidential campaign, including in the third-party challenge of Ross Perot, debates over America's declining industrial base often took center stage. Indeed, up through the early Clinton Administration, these issues had powerful champions. It was only after the information technology revolution of the 1990s, and its visions of a "new economy," that the political mainstream stopped worrying about the loss of key "old economy" industries. When the tech bubble collapsed in 2000, policy focused not on strengthening domestic industrial competitiveness but on inflating a real estate bubble and debt-fueled consumption. Business investment decisions, likewise, continued to be guided by the search for software-like returns and a focus on asset valuations over income growth.

Yet this political and economic consensus misunderstood key aspects of the internet revolution. Silicon Valley's breakthroughs were not attributable solely to the magic of markets but also to the commercialization of the last wave of Cold War defense technology initiatives and the great discoveries of New Deal-era corporate labs (which would soon become a target of cost-cutting shareholder activists). Once Silicon Valley became primarily oriented around financial markets and private venture capital, it ceased delivering major productivity-enhancing technologies. Instead, it offered advertising-driven social media platforms and profitless "sharing economy" companies, or more recently levered crypto bets—often

just naked attempts to secure monopolies through superior financial resources rather than technology, or to dress up, for example, commercial real estate rental firms as "tech companies." Crucially, during this transition Silicon Valley largely stopped producing silicon hardware, as the "designed in California, made in China" model became more financially attractive. Today's Silicon Valley is not simply a story of innovation but represents perhaps the most potent application of a longer-running neoliberal financial strategy aimed at separating intellectual property rents from the capital and labor costs of physical production.

Fundamentally, neoliberalism is an ideology of this virtual economy—both its unmoored financial speculation and the infinite proliferation of (online) identities. In this respect, it is not surprising that the disruptions caused by both COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict—which have demonstrated the political importance and economic value of physical production—have accelerated an even greater shift away from neoliberal policy paradigms than the financial crisis did. The real economy requires the competent coordination of physical supply chains—and capital and labor more generally—in a way that the virtual economy does not. The most important question that will decide the future of our political economy is not how many intellectuals proclaim the death of neoliberalism, or other partisan and theoretical quarrels, but how profound and long-lasting this "reassertion of the real" proves to be.

Julius Krein is the editor of American Affairs.

Book Review by James Piereson

Doing Good and Doing Well

Private Virtues, Public Vices: Philanthropy and Democratic Equality, by Emma Saunders-Hastings. The University of Chicago Press, 256 pages, $95 (cloth), $30 (paper)

Philanthropy is supposed to be a virtue—the "love of mankind" could hardly be a vice. But at least since the 18th century, charitable donors have come in for intense scrutiny and criticism. The Anglo-Dutch philosopher Bernard Mandeville wrote in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) about a society of bees that

lives in harmony and prosperity until its members decide to throw off their habits of self-interest and live according to Christian virtues. Having lost their appetite for gain or profit, the bees at length reconcile themselves to living the simple life in a hollowed-out tree. Their once-prosperous honey-making enterprise, however, lies in poverty and ruin. Mandeville's subtitle, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, indicated that private selfishness was necessary for public prosperity, progress, and the rule of law. Adam Smith and other writers of the Scottish Enlightenment later picked up this idea and incorporated it into their moral and economic doctrines, passing it along in turn to later generations of conservative and classical liberal thinkers.

Emma Saunders-Hastings, a political science professor at Ohio State University, inverts Mandeville's maxim in the title of her new book on philanthropy, *Private Virtues, Public Vices: Philanthropy and Democratic Equality*. For Saunders-Hastings, the private virtue of charitable giving leads to public vices of various kinds, much as the private virtues in Mandeville's fable produce ruin for his community of bees. In particular, she argues, private philanthropy as currently practiced in the United States undermines the nation's democratic ideals. "It is presumptively objectionable if outcomes of common concern and aspects of a society's common life are subject to the control of the very rich." It is wrong, she suggests, for philanthropists to trade their wealth for socio-political influence under the guise of charitable giving.

Thus Saunders-Hastings also objects when donations are made with "strings attached" for the purpose of changing the behavior of recipients or improving their performance. Donations in that form are made under the assumption that donors know better than recipients how to organize their programs. Today, many prominent

donors (including software magnates Bill and Melinda Gates, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and real estate mogul Eli Broad, among others) have poured funds into promoting their preferred educational method—be it online learning, core curricula, or charter schools. Mr. Zuckerberg donated $100 million some years ago to the Newark public schools to improve their performance, though his funds succeeded mainly in increasing the salaries for teachers and administrators, who were undoubtedly grateful for his philanthropy. Foundations have long made grants to colleges, universities, and think tanks to promote the teaching or study of various subjects, from Russian languages or macroeconomics to feminist history or gender theory. Saunders-Hastings thinks that philanthropy of this kind is paternalistic, allowing donors to set the agendas for schools and charitable organizations when they have no particular qualifications to do so.

These are not new criticisms; in fact, they are very old ones. A century ago, industrialist Andrew Carnegie and oil magnate John D. Rockefeller sought to incorporate their philanthropic enterprises at the same time as their businesses were beset by disputes with labor unions. Critics said it would be anti-democratic for the law to "institutionalize" Carnegie and Rockefeller, allowing them to fund favored social purposes with wealth they should have used to support their workers. Those Gilded Age "plutocrats," as Saunders-Hastings calls them, have descendants today in the persons of Gates, Zuckerberg, and others of great wealth. Nor is Saunders-Hastings the first to resurrect these arguments in recent years. In *Just Giving* (2018), Stanford University's Rob Reich attacked "big" philanthropy as a system for converting private wealth into public influence. That same year, journalist Anand Giridharadas wrote in *Winners Take All* that contempo-

rary philanthropy is mostly a pretense for wealthy people to gather in expensive enclaves to pool influence and resources. Philosopher David Callahan in *The Givers* (2017) argued that wealthy philanthropists accrue more influence than they deserve in a democratic society. Saunders-Hastings, though not quite so critical as some of these authors, nonetheless shares their view that philanthropy is at bottom a political enterprise that should be subject to greater public or popular control.

But Saunders-Hastings does not actually have much to say about how that popular control could be effectively instituted. She does not (thankfully) suggest that individuals should be prevented from accumulating wealth, or that it should be confiscated rather than donated to charity. She is not in favor of eliminating the charitable exemption on income taxes, as some have urged, because the same problems of wealth and inequality would recur even without the exemption. She suggests that the charitable exemption might be reserved for general-purpose grants only, but eliminated for grants awarded with conditions attached in order to rein in philanthropic paternalism. The legal definitions of tax-exempt charities might be tightened so that only socially constructive enterprises are accorded that benefit. She is sympathetic to increasing the payout requirement for private foundations (currently 5% of assets per year) so that more funds flow to charities while the assets of foundations are spent down over time. Trustees might be given more freedom to revise the terms of gifts given through estates, either to make them less restrictive or to bring them in line with contemporary concerns, though courts are understandably reluctant to interfere with lawful bequests. Donor control over grants might also be restricted by allocating seats on foundation boards to representatives of recipient institutions—a reform favored by many critics of private foundations

but resisted by trustees reluctant to open their organizations to a host of external pressures.

These proposals, along with others like them, have been circulating for decades. Many of them have been adopted voluntarily by some donors and trustees of private foundations. Others, such as limiting the tax exemption to charities favored by reformers, would be controversial and difficult to implement. Some states, California in particular, have considered new laws that would require foundations to diversify their boards or spend more of their funds to address poverty. Those are misguided measures that foundations in the state have criticized. Rightly so: they would politicize philanthropy, undermine philanthropic freedom, and eventually bring philanthropy under government control.

In Congress, there is little consensus on any of these proposals. The current laws governing foundations date back to the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which was adopted in response to populist criticisms that some foundations—the Ford Foundation in particular—were guilty of spending funds on partisan political controversies. That law established the 5% payout requirement, limited expenditures on lobbying, and banned them altogether in regard to partisan elections. Leaders in the foundation world have little appetite for revisiting the experience of that law's genesis, and with good reason.

There is no doubt that philanthropy has grown into a significant enterprise in America. It has been encouraged since 1917 by the income tax exemption, but it was also fueled by the growth and diffusion of wealth in post-war America, the stock market boom of the last four decades, and the charitable inclinations of millions of Americans. Philanthropy is an expression of America's free-market system, which enables some to accumulate wealth by responding to

the wants of consumers. The American economy has been spinning out innovations and wealth at unprecedented rates over the past several decades. The stock market alone has grown by 40 or 50 times in real terms since the early 1980s, creating new wealth and countless wealthy families. It is much to the credit of those individuals and families that, after accumulating wealth, they wish to give some of it away to charity. Most Americans regard that as a positive development, not as something to be lamented because it might be in tension with egalitarian goals.

Throughout U.S. history, voluntary nonprofit organizations have operated as a check on government by providing private pathways to serve the public interest. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that voluntary associations strengthen popular government by bringing individuals into contact with one another in pursuit of shared purposes. According to data from the National Philanthropic Trust and the Giving USA Foundation, Americans—including both individuals and institutions—donated some $485 billion to tax-exempt charities in 2021. That's about 2% of Gross Domestic Product, a large sum in comparison to donations made in other countries. Two thirds of that total, or about $327 billion, came from individuals, much of it going in modest sums to churches, synagogues, and local institutions such as civic associations, food banks, youth recreational leagues, and the like.

This looks like a democratic aspect of American philanthropy: it is widely dispersed; many people participate; the gifts are modest; the money flows to churches and local organizations. There is little in the way of paternalism associated with it. Yet many critics who worry about the influence of wealthy donors are *also* dissatisfied with this more populist form of philanthropy—mostly because it

is not organized or directed by anyone, and therefore cannot be mobilized to bring about "change"; and also because much of the money flows to religious organizations. Yet, if the goal is to promote democratic philanthropy (rather than expand government), then this is a good example of it.

At the other end of the scale, large grantmaking foundations such as the Ford, Rockefeller, and Gates foundations contributed $91 billion in 2021, or less than 20% of all donations, on assets of around $1.3 trillion. The assets of these foundations have expanded almost 20-fold since the early 1980s, even as they have donated at least 5% of those assets per year on charitable grants. The authors of these new books on philanthropy are worried that these large foundations act on behalf of wealthy donors. But the real problems lie elsewhere. Private foundations, with some exceptions, are certainly not run by "the wealthy," however that term might be defined. They are controlled by self-perpetuating trustees and professional staffs, not by the entrepreneurs who started them. The mid-level administrators who manage the daily operations of these enterprises have college and university backgrounds; they are skeptical of free markets, profit-seeking, and middle-class standards. Their interests are in other areas: diversity, racism, sexual identity, climate change, inequality, and related subjects. They deploy the wealth of their organizations partly to redistribute wealth and political power in the direction of the groups they fund.

There are, to be sure, a handful of conservative foundations that defend free markets or hope to scale back government programs, such as the John M. Olin (now defunct), Charles Koch, Bradley, and Scaife foundations. These trusts have had a fair amount of success in supporting influential scholars and institutions. Notwithstanding that success, however, they are out-

spent every year by a factor of 20 to 1 (or more) by progressive foundations like Ford, MacArthur, Hewlett, Bloomberg, and others. The vast majority of major philanthropic institutions occupy the liberal or progressive end of the political spectrum, and have done so since the 1960s when, led by the Ford Foundation, they bought into the open-ended agenda of "social change."

The new agenda called for foundations to scale back programs in research and education in favor of funding "advocacy" groups to pressure governments to adopt new programs, spend more money, and open up channels of power to new groups. Many race, gender, and ethnic advocacy groups originated in this era with foundation grants, as did many of the urban and environmental groups still active today. "Diversity" is one of the operational watchwords of today's foundation world, as it is also in universities, government agencies, and the Democratic Party. There are federal programs in operation today, such as the Public Broadcasting Service, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and various urban programs, that got their start as pilot programs supported by foundation grants. And *this* is where Tocqueville's democratic vision of philanthropy meets its most pernicious challenge: not in a scarcity of government control but in an overabundance of it. Far from deflecting or opposing government intervention, many foundations operate as partners with government in pressing for new programs and maintaining support for old ones. Foundations have promoted a host of programs, from Planned Parenthood to the National Urban League, in loose cooperation with federal departments and agencies, such as the Department of Education and the Environmental Protection Agency, which operate their own grants programs.

And so in recent decades, many once-independent organizations have evolved into appendages of government. The publication

Giving USA estimates that in recent years the federal government has supplied one third of all funds raised by nonprofit charities, a development long encouraged by large private philanthropies that donate to many of the same organizations. These are reputable institutions for the most part; among them are prestigious universities, hospitals, research organizations, and advocacy groups. But they no longer operate independently of government or as pillars of civil society. The expansion of government, which has extensively co-opted private philanthropy and voluntary associations, represents an extraordinarily potent challenge to democracy in America—and one for which there is no ready solution.

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THE MOST POWERFUL NAVY IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD
MAYBE BOMBING PEARL HARBOUR WASN'T SUCH A GOOD IDEA AFTER ALL
TOKYO
1999 J.N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

Cartoon from the New York Herald Tribune*, 1943*

Book Review by Arthur Herman

From Sea to Shining Sea

Victory at Sea: Naval Power and the Transformation of the Global Order in World War II, by Paul Kennedy. Yale University Press, 544 pages, $37.50

Who Can Hold the Sea: The U.S. Navy in the Cold War, 1945–1960, by James D. Hornfischer. Bantam Books, 480 pages, $36

To Rule the Waves: How Control of the World's Oceans Shapes the Fate of the Superpowers, by Bruce D. Jones. ribner, 400 pages, $28 (cloth), $18.99 (paper)

The Blue Age: How the U.S. Navy Created Global Prosperity—And Why We're in Danger of Losing It, by Gregg Easterbrook. Public Affairs, 304 pages, $30

Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans, by James Stavridis. Penguin Press, 384 pages, $19 (paper)

"Already Americans can enforce respect for their flag, soon they will be able to make it feared.... They are born to rule the seas, as the Romans were to conquer the world."

—Alexis de Tocqueville,
Democracy in America (1835)

Though the republic was barely half a century old in 1835—and just a mono-coastal country facing onto the Atlantic—Tocqueville had no doubt that America was destined to be a maritime nation, ready to compete with the most powerful maritime empire in history, Great Britain. It was American seafarers who carried nine tenths of the goods from the Western Hemisphere to Europe and three quarters of Europe's exports to the Americas—while English ships in New York Harbor, he observed, were "a pitiful handful." "Seafaring and sea-trading," he declared, "brought out the heroic in the American character," its dangers and uncertainties drawing the typical American into "obeying an impulse in his nature." That sea-tested heroism made America "a land of wonders" and would give the United States its future spirit.

Nearly two centuries later, historians, scholars, and policymakers are rediscovering the importance of the sea in American history and culture. Sea power was not only vital to American history in the 20th century, including World War II and the Cold War, but will be more important than ever in the 21st century.

We find ourselves today tested by a powerful geopolitical rival—China—for control of the world's oceans. This testing is about more than military power and the relative strength of the U.S. Navy vis-à-vis our Chinese adversary, as significant as those issues are. It's also about the importance of global maritime trade for the future of the U.S. economy—one can even say for the future of civilization and freedom.

Three new books on sea power—Paul Kennedy's *Victory at Sea: Naval Power and the Transformation of the Global Order in World War II*, James D. Hornfischer's *Who Can Hold the Sea: The U.S. Navy in the Cold War 1945–1960*, and James Stavridis's *Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*—help us to rethink America's role in the world. They also show how the virtues Tocqueville identified with his ideal American can still translate into leadership of the democratic maritime nations in peacetime, as well as in war.

Each book fosters an appreciation of how command of the seas is crucial for acquiring and maintaining superpower status. Naval strategists and politicians in the British Isles understood this, going back to William Pitt the Elder and even Sir Walter Raleigh, who wrote in 1629 that "whosoever commands the seas commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself."

Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American professor at the Naval War College, translated this insight into modern terms in his classic, *The Influence of Seapower Upon History* (1890). Captain Mahan of the U.S. Navy understood that sea power was about more than great navies. Rising to the challenge of being a great nation meant turning America's extensive Atlantic and Pacific coasts into a series of entrance ramps into the world's ocean-going trade, and then

dominating that trade so extensively that America's supremacy could never be challenged or reversed—while building a navy able to protect those sea lanes wherever they were threatened.

First as navy secretary and then as president, Theodore Roosevelt took up Mahan's challenge. Roosevelt used Mahan's insights to promote the creation of a modern American battle fleet able to cruise the oceans and crush the last remnants of Spain's empire in the Western Hemisphere. Two other rising power rivals, imperial Germany and Japan, took up the Mahan challenge and devoted themselves to building strong navies. But America's combination of maritime geography and industrial power would give the United States what it needed not only to fight but to prevail decisively in two world wars.

World War II historians have always known that the United States Navy was a central actor in the Pacific Theater, from Pearl Harbor to Midway and Leyte Gulf. Yale historian Paul Kennedy, author of the classic *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), takes this general proposition a step further in his new, beautifully illustrated book (with original watercolors by maritime artist Ian Marshall). Kennedy points out that victory in World War II rested with whoever commanded access to the world's oceans, which was a matter not just of naval vessels but also maritime capacity to ship and transport goods and manpower overseas. In Kennedy's view, World War II was fought and decided "on every sea," but especially in the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific. Despite the image we have of American G.I.s fighting a land war in France and Italy, and Marines slogging it out with Japanese soldiers in Iwo Jima and the Philippines, those soldiers would not have been on those beaches without America's overwhelming superiority at sea.

This was not a predestined outcome. In 1939 the U.S. was one of six major sea powers, alongside Germany, Japan, Italy, France, and, above all, Great Britain. Since Theodore Roosevelt, American presidents had absorbed the idea that sea power was the key to world power. But Great Britain—the power from whose example Mahan had drawn his historical and strategic lessons—still dominated the waves. The most important challenges it faced at sea came from Germans, Japanese, and, in the Mediterranean, Italians.

But by 1945 the United States Navy was without doubt the most powerful in the world, with the once-dominant Royal Navy steadily falling astern. Twenty-five years later the Royal Navy would shrink to a shadow of its former self, with only three carriers instead of the 12 it held in 1950, and half the number of destroyers. The U.S. Navy, once the "second service," dominated every major sea and ocean.

America's newfound dominance came with the unleashing of its industrial might. One of Kennedy's best examples of what our maritime-industrial complex could achieve is the *Essex*-class carriers, which transported American naval air power across the vast stretches of the Pacific with decisive effect. The carriers were not only faster than their pre-Pearl Harbor predecessors but possessed an immense operating range. They also carried more combat aircraft: 36 Grumman Hellcat fighters, 36 Curtiss Helldiver dive bombers, and 18 Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers. Many of those torpedo bombers were built at the General Motors facilities in New Jersey. The naval projection of airpower simply overwhelmed the Japanese in a series of lopsided victories that cleared the skies over the Pacific and prepared the amphibious landings that brought the war directly to Japan.

Kennedy also hails the smaller, *Casablanca*-class carriers designed and built by the construction engineer genius Henry Kai-

ser. Kaiser had built Hoover Dam but, before starting on his famed Liberty ships (1941-45), was so ignorant of nautical matters that he didn't know the bow from the prow. Between November 1942 and July 1943, Kaiser yards at Vancouver, Washington launched 50 *Casablanca*-class escort carriers. By war's end, they'd launch more than 125. Faster than their bigger *Essex*-class counterparts, Kaiser's "baby flat tops" provided essential air support for operations across the blue waters of the Pacific, from Tarawa to Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

The story is similar for the mass production of submarines and destroyers, as well as the landing craft that brought soldiers and Marines from North Africa to the home islands of Japan. None of this would have been sustainable, however, without the logistical support of a vastly expanded merchant marine. By 1944 American yards were turning out 50 new cargo vessels a day, each ready to carry food, equipment, planes, tanks, and oil cargos anywhere the Allies were fighting.

The long-term impact of this rapid expansion was significant. It is astonishing that when Mahan wrote his *Influence of Seapower* there was no U.S. merchant marine worth mentioning. The two world wars changed the landscape. Kaiser's Liberty ships laid the foundation for an American civilian shipbuilding industry and merchant marine that would only gradually be overtaken by South Korea, Japan, and China.

Kennedy dates the big change from 1943. That was the year the tide of war decisively shifted to the Allies. It was also the year, Kennedy writes, "in which the sheer productive muscle of the United States…at last realized itself in all the arenas of the world war."

"It was not just a story of more and more warships," Kennedy adds; "it was also a tale of a new international order emerging"

from U.S. shipyards and ports. America not only won the war but came to dominate the peace that followed. America didn't depend on an overseas empire but on cooperation with other nations in a vast trading network, protected and defended by the U.S. Navy—arguably the most powerful military force in the world. By 1945, it had grown to nearly 1,200 major combatant ships, including 99 aircraft carriers, eight "fast" battleships, and ten prewar "old" battleships. It could also count on 377 destroyers, 361 frigates (there were none in the U.S. Navy before the war), 232 submarines, and over 2,500 amphibious craft (another category of U.S. naval vessel that didn't exist before the war). Even after 1,896 naval vessels were moved into inactive reserve with demobilization, the fleet was large enough to offer overwhelming global dominance.

The late naval historian James Hornfischer's final work, *Who Can Hold the Sea: The U.S. Navy in the Cold War 1945–1960*, takes up the story in the immediate postwar years. Hornfischer describes how admirals who had won World War II—like Chester Nimitz and William Halsey—emphasized the importance of maintaining that dominance to Congress and the Truman Administration, even though America's new opponent, the USSR, did not aspire to naval power. The war had proved that the mere existence of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans could no longer safeguard America. Still, properly utilized, they provided rich opportunities for the U.S. to dominate the waves in future.

Like Tocqueville, Nimitz understood the importance of the sea to the American character, even to American exceptionalism. Hornfischer quotes the admiral at the National Geographic Society: "Sea power has its roots deep in the core of our country." Those roots, Nimitz continued, "draw nourishment from the farms and

ranches that feed our men. They derive from our mines, our logging camps, our mills and factories. There is scarcely a village in the geographical center of the continent which does not contribute in some way to American sea power."

Drawing from the experience of World War II, Nimitz warned that "[n]o nation can wage successful war which fails to utilize its industrial capacity to the fullest. It is not enough to have a great industrial plant. That plant must be mobilized, supplied, and made an integral part of the war machine." A navy that wasn't fully supported by that manufacturing and shipbuilding base wouldn't be able to do its job in the postwar era.

Although Nimitz and his fellow admirals understood what was needed to meet a future threat, it was James Forrestal, the wartime navy secretary and the nation's first secretary of defense, who understood the magnitude of the danger the Soviet Union would pose. As Hornfischer describes, Forrestal turned George Kennan's famous Long Telegram (1946) about the nature of the Soviet threat into an action plan for shaping America's newly merged armed services into an effective deterrent force, starting with the U.S. Navy—despite the 80% reduction from its 1946 expenditures.

Forrestal, Hornfischer writes, "was willing to fight not only for Nimitz's vision of sea power as deriving from every activity in American productive life, but for a vision of America's role…as both leader and organizer in a fractious world arena." Forrestal saw the army and navy as "complementary assets." Their continuing competition for funding and resources in the new Defense Department would produce original thinking and enterprise, "breakthroughs that never would have seen the light of day had one side been able to bulldoze the other."

The story of how the navy turned competition into strategic and technological breakthroughs occupies the rest of Hornfischer's book. A quartet of heroes emerges from his narrative, starting with Admiral Arleigh Burke, the navy's chief of naval operations (CNO) from 1955 to 1961, who pushed hard for the technologies that would maintain the navy's dominance at the global level, and Admiral Richard Connolly, who convinced his superiors of the importance of an American naval presence in the Mediterranean as Britain steadily retreated from its global commitments.

Then we have Hyman Rickover, the ultimate outsider and cantankerous genius behind the creation of the USS *Nautilus*, and for more than 30 years the overseer of America's nuclear submarine fleet. His uncompromising attitude toward superiors and subordinates alike (job candidates interviewed in his office, including future president Jimmy Carter, often found that Rickover had shortened the front legs of their chair to increase their discomfort) and his maxim, "Good ideas are not adopted automatically; they must be driven with courageous impatience," transformed America's submarine fleet into a major strategic asset—and established a safety record for nuclear power that became the envy of the world.

The book's fourth hero is Admiral William Raborn, who was in charge of the Polaris program, the world's first submarine-launched ballistic missile. As Hornfischer describes him, Raborn was as driven as Rickover but more beloved than feared by subordinates. He was careful to build a strong working relationship with his staffers' families and make them feel part of the team: "Wives and children were given to understand that Polaris would open a new capability in national defense, that it was for their individual protection." Raborn's success—the Polaris program took less than five years to complete—was helped immensely by the blank check CNO Burke gave him to cut through bureaucratic inertia.

Ironically, it was during former five-star general Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency that the U.S. Navy emerged as a major player at the strategic table. By June 1956 the navy numbered 670,000 personnel, with 404 combatant ships and 22 aircraft carriers, including new supercarriers like USS *Forrestal*. For Admiral Burke, "The war in Korea revealed that America could do nothing on the far side of an ocean without control of the sea." "Every U.S. airfield and U.S. division stationed overseas," he told Congress, "is a vote of confidence in the U.S. Navy's ability to supply and maintain it." Mahan's vision had become institutionalized as part of America's permanent defense posture.

By the end of *Who Can Hold the Sea* we can see the shape of the U.S. Navy that would impose a naval blockade on Cuba, conduct a transoceanic war in Vietnam, and hold a trump card in the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union—as America's fleet of nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) became the most versatile and stealthy part of its nuclear triad.

Hornfischer died before he could write of the rebuilding of U.S. naval supremacy under Ronald Reagan in the aftermath of Vietnam and in the face of growing Soviet naval aspirations. Two shifts in military strategy allowed America to win the Cold War. The first was Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, launched in 1983. It convinced Mikhail Gorbachev that the USSR couldn't engage in a high-tech weapons race without major economic and political changes. Attempting these changes ultimately led to the Soviet Union's collapse.

The other, less heralded, shift was Sea Plan 2000, the American Navy's response to the Soviet's bid for maritime supremacy. The post-Vietnam Soviet challenge had led the Carter Administration to adopt a defensive crouch from Latin America to Africa,

choosing to deploy the navy's dwindling assets to guard America's Mediterranean and Atlantic approaches. Sea Plan 2000 proposed instead an aggressive strategy, with the U.S. pushing the envelope where it was outnumbered (by 1980 the Soviet sub fleet had grown to alarming proportions) and outclassed.

At a dinner in June 1977, future secretary of the navy John Lehman (like Forrestal, a former Wall Street banker), navy secretary Graham Clayton, counsel to the Senate Armed Services Committee James Woolsey, and military writer Bing West sketched the strategy on a paper napkin. It marked the rebirth of the U.S. Navy's global dominance, usually described as "the 600-ship Navy." After his election, Reagan tasked Lehman with implementing the strategy.

Lehman got as far as 594 ships. But those ships included next-generation Aegis cruisers and destroyers with advanced antimissile systems, and Ohio-class nuclear submarines. The navy also built more *Nimitz*-class aircraft carriers. By 1985 it was clear to the Soviets that they could not win the naval arms race. Once again, America's industrial shipbuilding might had come to the rescue of America's sea power dominance.

That dominance suffered eclipse with the end of the Cold War. Budget cutbacks starting in the 1990s became an inevitable part of cashing in on the post-Cold War "peace dividend." Though the navy remained large and resilient enough to support major overseas operations like Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, it moved to the sidelines as a strategic weapon. As for its Marine Corps, it found itself drawn away from its expeditionary warfare role—"the projectile fired by the Navy"—to take over the burden of counterinsurgency.

The world, meanwhile, was watching the rise of a new challenger to America's seapower dominance—namely, China—on a scale previous strategic thinkers would find hard to contemplate. Aristotle was the first to propose that the oceans are one. Centuries of subsequent exploration turned theoretical speculation into empirical fact. It was therefore inevitable that the fundamentals of sea power would grow to a global scale, first through great empires, then through the economic system that rules today, which renders the world's nations as dependent as ever on the flow of trade by sea.

Two recent books try to address how the U.S. should adjust itself to this global scale. Both Bruce D. Jones's *To Rule the Waves* and Gregg Easterbrook's *The Blue Age* rightly worry about the decline of U.S. sea power and the rise of China as a maritime and naval power. But both wrongly think the answer is to be found in a progressive globalist agenda.

Since 2005 Chinese leadership has focused on building a merchant fleet second to none, alongside its commitment to become a naval power ready to challenge its American counterpart. Today China's merchant marine is the largest in the world, with the port of Shanghai handling 40 million container drops a year compared to just 9 million for its closest U.S. rival, Los Angeles. Nearby Jiangnan shipyard, which opened in 2008, built more than 206 cargo vessels in 2021, more than one fifth of the total global output, as well as getting to work on China's third aircraft carrier.

This is part of a comprehensive strategy for Beijing. It is the maritime component of China's "One Belt, One Road" policy, a redrawing of the map of the world with Chinese characteristics, e.g., dotted by ports built with Chinese money and Chinese facilities servicing the Chinese merchant fleet as well as ships and submarines for the Chinese navy. What Beijing has carried out in

the South China Sea is now fully underway as far away as South America, the west coast of Africa, Mogadishu on the horn of Africa, Pakistan, and even at the port of Haifa in Israel.

In the face of this challenge, the Brookings Institution's Jones demands that the U.S. Navy mobilize its resources to the utmost—to fight climate change. *The New Republic*'s Easterbrook advocates a similarly disastrous shift of focus, staking our future not on a strong navy but on reconciliation with China and increased world governance of the seas. Underlying both Jones's and Easterbrook's answers to China's threat is the larger mistake that liberals usually make, of assuming that geopolitical competition is the result of misunderstanding and not deeper, irreconcilable disagreements and conflicts.

A more conservative perspective would be that there are sometimes differences between great states that can be managed, but not massaged away. It's the duty of the statesman and strategist to devise ways to manage those differences, including with the use of force. What China wants from its maritime grand strategy, and what we and our democratic allies will need from ours, are two very different things.

The proof is what's happening with Taiwan. If there's any place where the American ability to not just project power but to *fight a sea war* is at stake, it's Taiwan. As the U.S. and China increasingly square off over the fate of the island nation (which supplies 90% of the world's high-end semiconductors), the question of whether the United States has the means (not to mention the will) to prevent a Chinese blockade or invasion becomes a question about the future of the entire global economic system. Yet Easterbrook barely mentions Taiwan; Jones grasps the naval stakes involved, but not the larger economic ones.

Admiral James Stavridis's *Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans* contains a much clearer understanding of what sea power is about, and what's ultimately at risk. Stavridis provides a *tour de horizon* of the world's major oceans, starting with the Pacific and ending with the Arctic, the most recent arena of great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China. He explains how trade and navies shaped the history of nations since (in the case of the Mediterranean) the Phoenicians and King Minos. Each chapter also supplies an account of how America became a power operating in sometimes remote waters, often against its inclinations—usually to support allies against tyranny, but increasingly (as in the case of the South China Sea) to protect our own national interests.

But the heart of the book is Stavridis's last chapter on "America and the Oceans," in which he is as forthright as Forrestal, or even Mahan: "National power derives from engagement via the world's oceans along three key vectors: production (which leads to the need for international trade and commerce), shipping (both merchant and naval), and colonies and allies spread across the globe, forming a network of bases from which to project sea power." This summary of Mahan defines the parameters within which America-as-superpower must operate, arising from its dependence on global trade.

For example, our 133,000 kilometers of coastline, writes Stavridis, "afford immediate access to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic oceans, as well as the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea to the south." This is "an enviable position for developing and exploiting sea power," both as defensive shield and springboard to power projection. Great American statesmen understood this, from Alexander Hamilton to Theodore Roosevelt, and from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan.

Although Stavridis acknowledges many international law of the sea issues (he is concerned, for example, about the threat of malign actors to the undersea cables on which the internet and cyber depend), he never wavers in asserting that sea power is ultimately about naval power. "The United States is a global maritime power. This is as true today as it has been since the beginning of the Republic." "If the United States is to prosper and lead in this century," Stavridis writes, "we need a coherent national strategy"—one could even say a blue-water strategy that also keeps us out of expensive and protracted land wars. A navy that shrinks to less than 350 "significant battle force ships" imperils that mission.

That mission hasn't changed with the end of "endless wars" and a scaling back of America's role as global cop. After Iraq and Afghanistan, a growing element of conservative opinion understandably demands a more modest role for the United States in the world. It is impatient with open-ended commitments to supporting a distant land war in Ukraine, or a future war in the Taiwan Strait. The "Little America" wing of the Republican Party has a point, but it must recognize that the key to keeping the United States out of distant conflicts is a navy that's large enough, flexible enough, and powerful enough to keep those threats away from our shores by dealing with them *in situ* when they first arise. If the United States and NATO had had a maritime presence in the Black Sea, would Putin's invasion of Ukraine still have happened?

Whether global cop or shining city on a hill, the United States can't escape its maritime destiny. As Stavridis explains, "This means supporting a reasonably sized civilian merchant marine, a powerful capable navy, a robust shipbuilding industry, a competent fishing fleet; efficient posts and infrastructure; ice-breaking capability for

the Arctic, and the ability to conduct broad area surveillance of the ocean approaches to our nation."

That's a tall order. The Trump Administration tried to tackle at least one of those requirements, namely navy shipbuilding. The Future Sea Force plan released by the Trump Department of Defense in 2020 attempted to restore American naval supremacy through its goal of a 355-ship navy. Yet that plan had to rely on a maritime industry, both naval and commercial, which has significantly less capacity than the world's other leading shipbuilding nations—South Korea, Japan, and, ominously, China.

When Reagan became president there were 22 large shipyards in the United States. Today there are fewer than ten. The U.S. contributes less than 1% of global commercial shipbuilding by tonnage. Only six shipyards—five of them belonging to either General Dynamics or Huntington Ingalls Industries—are able to construct large warships for the U.S. Navy.

Even so, in 2020 the Defense Department delivered no less than ten ships. It was a testament to what can be accomplished even with a sharply diminished shipbuilding capacity—and a harbinger of what can be done with a modest expansion of that capacity.

Stavridis in effect returns us to where we started. In the end, the capacity to reverse the decline of U.S. maritime and naval power rests on the force of political will as an expression of national character. As Tocqueville recognized, and Mahan reaffirmed, that character has been built "around the instinct for commerce, bold enterprise in the pursuit of gain, and a keen scent for the trails that lead to it"—a character around which an American maritime future can be reimagined and rebuilt.

"No other nation in the world possesses vaster, deeper, or more secure ports for commerce than the Americans," Tocqueville ex-

plained. Yet it's a mistake to describe Americans' surge in seagoing enterprise as a matter of geographic advantage. It depends instead, he wrote, "on purely intellectual and moral qualities":

> The American…sets sail while the storm is still rumbling; by night as well as by day he spreads full sails to the wind; he repairs storm damage as he goes; and when at last he draws near the end of his voyage, he flies toward the coast as if he could already see his port.

Are we still the people the astute Frenchman saw as destined to rule the seas? Hard to say. But by rediscovering the sea's importance for our past and future, we can find out who we are and who we can be.

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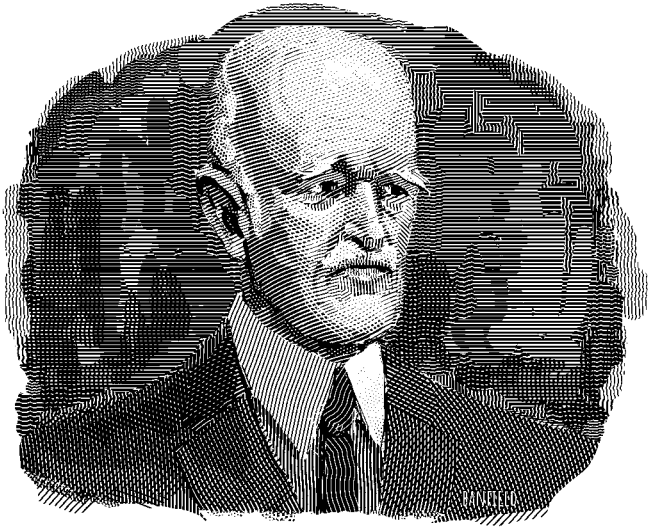

Book Review by Michael Anton

The Containment of George Kennan

Kennan: A Life Between Worlds, by Frank Costigliola.
Princeton University Press, 648 pages, $39.95

If you know one thing about the late George Frost Kennan (1904–2005), it's that he was the principal author of the "containment" doctrine at the heart of America's winning strategy in the Cold War. If you know two things, you probably know that he came to doubt and even repudiate and regret his own decisive contribution to America's role in that struggle. If your knowledge extends to three or more things, you are almost certainly a priest in

the national security clerisy, a professor of international relations, or a worshiper of those who erected the post-World War II international order—categories not exclusive.

For a long time, I was in the first camp. Although in college I studied history (among other things), my focus was on the more distant past. Still, in reading biographies of 20th-century notables (as I liked to do), one inevitably comes across Kennan's name. He seemed to me at the time to be a sort of middling figure: important enough to be mentioned and his one big contribution summarized and credited, but not sufficiently significant to merit his own full-scale treatment. After all, prominent as Kennan was for a while, he never made it into one of those really big-time jobs—senator, governor, cabinet secretary—held by those, including many of his peers, about whom biographies are written.

Some years later, I found myself near the top—in terms of proximity, not seniority—of the national security bureaucracy. This was shortly before, and for nearly four years after, 9/11. At that time, there was a lot of talk about a new international system aborning, something much more fundamental than the "new world order" George H.W. Bush had prophesied after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This would, it was hoped, be the most significant remaking of international relations since the (roughly) five-year period following the end of the Second World War. And those in charge of American foreign policy at that time (my bosses) would be the ones to make it all happen, thus ensconcing their names in the history books no less than…George Kennan's.

Because I had to write these people's speeches and manage their interactions with the press, I figured I had better learn what the fuss was all about. Luckily, the library on the third floor of what was then still known as the Old Executive Of-

fice Building had a plethora of useful volumes. The gateway for me was *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (1986), Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas's seminal parallel biographies of the most important appointed officials who helped erect the "rules-based" or "liberal international order." From there, I moved on to other biographies, popular histories, and eventually to memoirs—of which Dean Acheson's *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (1969) is the finest, not just from this cohort, but probably the best Washington memoir ever. Though naturally (given the genre) self-serving, it is also entertaining, informative, crisply written, and sharp-tongued. It remains a pleasure to read, something one can say about very few similar efforts.

George Kennan's memoirs—especially the first volume, which covers the crucial 1945–1950 period—though less fun to read, were arguably more useful. Here was a wealth of detail about what the wise men actually contemplated, what they attempted and what they rejected, their successes and failures, plus Kennan's (seemingly endless) recriminations about what might have been if only they had listened to him.

I learned quickly that Kennan was (and remains) a beloved figure in the national security clerisy, especially among the more academic types or those who fancy themselves intellectuals. Studying this man seemed a useful way to gain access to the higher-ups' innermost thinking.

I also learned, to my great surprise, that George Kennan was still alive! (He would die soon after the president's second inauguration, at age 101.) Moreover, he was not, as he approached the century mark, a doddering old has-been, at least not mentally. No, he was sharp as a tack, and he frequently used that sharpness to carve precisely targeted wounds into the Bush Administration's hide and

to dissect the pronouncements of my bosses. Kennan drove Condoleezza Rice, in particular, absolutely nuts. His criticisms started right after 9/11 and increased as the Iraq war approached. Kennan was, to say the least, skeptical that any of the benefits the administration promised from that war would actually materialize. I think what bothered Rice was not just the criticisms themselves but the fact that they weren't coming from some partisan schmuck or no-name hack but from the most distinguished living high priest in her sect, and one whom she had been trained to revere. And who was, like her, a Russia expert and fluent in the language. (As the incumbent secretary of state, Rice would sit in the front pew at Kennan's memorial service at the National Cathedral.)

Rice was, by contrast, much buoyed by John Lewis Gaddis's short book *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004), which defended the administration's post-9/11 policies and placed them in a historic context stretching back to John Quincy Adams. She enthusiastically recommended it to all the staff, almost to the point of making it required reading, and even gave copies away. Gaddis, I would later learn, was already Kennan's hand-picked biographer, though his *George F. Kennan: An American Life* would not appear until 2011.

It's safe to say, though, that in this respect at least, Kennan had the last laugh, or would have, were there anything funny about America's misadventures in Iraq. As the unfolding of events would show, he was right in virtually all of his criticisms and predictions. If only we had listened to him, indeed!

Not that kennan was right about everything. One hallmark of his long career was a pile of spectacular misjudgments to go along with those many spectacular insights. By far his most spectacular misjudgment was his own rejection—at times

hinging on vehement—of his most spectacular insight.

Understanding this requires knowing something about Kennan's life, and in this we are aided by a new biography, *Kennan: A Life Between Worlds*, by Frank Costigliola. Costigliola, a Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Connecticut who edited *The Kennan Diaries* (2014) for publication, is certainly well qualified to write such a book, yet one wonders why it was needed, given the exhaustive treatment presented by Gaddis scarcely a decade prior. What more was there to say?

A Life Between Worlds is certainly not better written than Gaddis's *An American Life* (reviewed in these pages by Angelo Codevilla, Spring 2012). For one thing, it's irritatingly repetitive. How many times does Costigliola look forward, and then backward, to the "Long Telegram" and the "X Article"? I lost count, but it's a lot. Granted, these are the two documents on which Kennan's fame chiefly rests, and a little foreshadowing often helps the reader. But Costigliola overdoes it, making the same points over and over, not to bring out new facets but worded as if he hadn't made them before, thus robbing the central treatment, when the time comes for it in his narrative, of most of its punch.

There are also a number of nontrivial mistakes. For example, Dean Acheson was not an assistant secretary of state overseeing Kennan in the immediate postwar era; Acheson hadn't been an assistant secretary since 1945 and during George Kennan's glory days in Foggy Bottom was in private law practice. "Mutual Assured Destruction" (MAD) was not even an apple in the Rand Corporation's eye in the 1940s. First, there was "Assured Destruction," coined (and made policy) in the early 1960s, then ridiculed by conservative critics as "MAD" in 1972. George Shultz was not secretary of state when the Berlin Wall fell; he had exited ten months earlier along with his boss Ronald Reagan. There are also a lot of typos,

repeated words, and other little infelicities. I point all this out not so much to chastise Costigliola (even the most conscientious author is bound to let some errors sneak through) but to wonder: what happened to fact-checking and proofreading?

The two main differences between Costigliola's and Gaddis's treatment are, first, the former is at pains to emphasize, as vindication of his subject's judgment, Kennan's later revisionism about containment: Costigliola clearly thinks that policy, at least as implemented, was a costly mistake. Gaddis by contrast argues that containment was sound in both conception and execution.

The second is that Costigliola spends more time trying to tease out Kennan's inner thoughts and relatively less on the political events that drove his life. (The book is marketed as the first biography to be written after the publication of Kennan's diaries, which is true, but a bit misleading: Kennan gave Gaddis complete access to all his papers, including the diaries; Gaddis nonetheless chose, if not to ignore them, at least not to dwell on them.) One result of Costigliola's approach is that it really draws out what might be termed the "instability" of his subject. George Kennan was undoubtedly talented and brilliant, and made many real contributions to his country, but he was also mercurial, histrionic, hypersensitive, self-absorbed, self-pitying, and solipsistic. Readers of this book will be much less surprised by Kennan's failure to make it to the top than was Kennan himself.

Even in Kennan's moments of greatest influence, those most inclined to value his insights (and many of the machers around, and above, him weren't) tended to keep him at arm's length. No American knew more about Russia or, arguably, Germany, but his judgments were, at best, erratic, and more often than not, all over

the map. Consistency was not Kennan's strong suit. For instance, he wore out his welcome in the State Department partly over his insistence that the United States support the reunification of Germany—and then, when the opportunity for reunification finally came, squandered what influence he still had by denigrating the very idea of reunification.

George Kennan was born in Milwaukee in vaguely upper-class circumstances. His mother's family was rich but thought their daughter had married down and so never warmed to George's father. His mother died when George was a mere two months old, leaving a psychic wound that never healed, and to which Costigliola returns again and again, because Kennan himself did. Also in the picture was a wicked stepmother, or at least that's the way the Kennan children saw her, though Costigliola recounts nothing worse than prudishness and a little emotional distance.

Kennan's father was something of a ne'er-do-well—not a wastrel, exactly, but unambitious and, despite his expertise in what should have been the lucrative practice of tax law, inept at navigating the real world. As a result, the Kennan family was always pinched for money, though far from destitute: they lived in a big house (a gift from Kennan's maternal grandparents) with servants and vacationed at an elegant lakeside summer retreat. They also had enough to travel to Europe and to send George to a private military school, and then to Princeton, where he excelled.

George had already shown his nascent abilities when, on a family sojourn to Germany at age eight, he acquired the language in a little over four months and thereafter maintained a lifelong fluency. He would later, under the auspices of the Foreign Service, which he joined right after college, learn Czech, French, Norwegian, Polish,

Portuguese, and—of course—Russian, the latter probably more thoroughly than any American ever has.

When one imagines the skills you'd want in your country's diplomats, the mind turns immediately to languages, and then to knowledge of other countries' histories, cultures, and customs. George Kennan had all these in spades, to a degree I doubt any American envoy has even come close to possessing over the last quarter century at least. Such talents are no doubt rare; career diplomat and former secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger called Kennan "the best Foreign Service officer in the history of the State Department." But it's as if we've given up even trying. Today, languages are not only not required to enter the Foreign Service; once in, the teaching of them is perfunctory at best, and officers are moved around so much that it's all but impossible for them to gain real expertise in any particular country or its traditions. Kennan, by contrast, learned Germany and especially Russia to their roots. This made him very useful for many decades to the top figures in the American foreign policy establishment.

After productive if unremarkable stints in relatively easy postings where he excelled—Kennan was the most rapidly promoted young diplomat of his generation—in 1933 he was among the few who cut the ribbon on America's brand-new embassy in Moscow, where his command of the language and knowledge of the country proved indispensable to his superiors and their managers in Washington. Always lurching back and forth between naïveté and steely-eyed realism, Kennan first imagined that a grand rapprochement between the USA and the USSR (brokered by George Kennan) was just around the corner, and then was appalled by the horror of Stalin's purges, which he closely monitored from his office in Red Square and which ensnared many of his Russian

friends. This spectacle turned Kennan, never sympathetic to Communism, into its implacable enemy, a stance he never shed, though he would also never give up his belief that coming to terms with the Soviets was both desirable and possible, even after—as he bitterly complained—the Kremlin cut off all contact and did everything it could to isolate him from his Russian contacts and the Russian people.

Kennan bounced around a bit as war approached, even serving more than two years in wartime Berlin before being detained for six months by the Nazis after Pearl Harbor. Soon he was back in Moscow for the duration of the conflict. The U.S. and USSR were "allies," so things were better for him on a personal level—he was allowed to get out and talk to people—but ever the contrarian, he thought the Roosevelt Administration's policy was naïve, and said so. He favored sharply curtailing the virtually unlimited American aid flowing to the USSR. He also saw sooner than anyone—even Winston Churchill—that, in pushing the Nazis out of Russia, Stalin sought to conquer as far west as possible and keep all of that territory, with its people and resources, after the war. Kennan urged (to no avail) the Roosevelt Administration to realize this and do something about it while the United States still maintained the superior position.

Thus, when our erstwhile faux ally turned unapologetic enemy, it was George Kennan who had to explain to a bewildered (and dispirited) establishment what was going on and what to do about it. The "Long Telegram" was a top-secret (at the time) cable—dictated in one marathon session in February 1946 from Kennan's sickbed in the Moscow embassy—which interprets Soviet behavior as arising from a combination of traditional Russian security concerns that prevail no matter who, or what regime, rules in the Kremlin, plus unique contributions from Communist ideology.

Kennan argued that, to a certain degree, Soviet Russia was just behaving like Russia: seeking to protect its long, flat, indefensible frontier by pushing its effective border as far west as possible. The strategy was little different from Peter (or Catherine) the Great's, with the notable exception that Stalin had managed to drive much farther than the czars had ever dreamed. If the term "grand strategy" has a coherent meaning (Kennan himself dismissed it; "Drop the word 'grand,'" he once advised the author of a lecture with that title), this is it. But the Communist overlay made everything worse. The contemporary USSR would be especially prickly, paranoid, recalcitrant, hostile, and hard to deal with for the foreseeable future. The West may not have sought a conflict with its former ally, but it had one regardless and needed to adjust—quickly.

The Long Telegram caused a sensation in Washington, where it was read by just about anyone cleared for it, from the president on down. It dispelled the fog about Soviet intentions (and behavior) still prevalent as a hangover from wartime conviviality and Soviet penetration of the U.S. government. More than Kennan's analysis, his prescription is what made his reputation. He was the first to offer a third way, a *via media* between the awful alternatives of yet another European war or passive acquiescence to Soviet aggression. "Containment" became not just the new Washington watchword but the glue that would hold together the Western alliance for the subsequent 45 years.

The "X Article"—formally "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," published pseudonymously in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*—is (I would say) the most consequential journal article of all time, on any subject. The text is more or less the Long Telegram rewritten for public presentation and with more emphasis on Communist ideology than historical Russian strategy. Kennan's

superiors (especially navy secretary James Forrestal) thought it important that a public case be made, in order to rally elite and then wider opinion for what John F. Kennedy would later call the "long twilight struggle" ahead. Washington also thought it was too dangerous, for the government's relations with Moscow and for Kennan's career, to put George's name on it—hence the pseudonym. But everyone knew who had written it, including Stalin, whose hard feelings would help doom Kennan's mission to Moscow five years later.

The years 1946–1948 were Kennan's apogee. He returned from the USSR as America's, and arguably the world's, most celebrated diplomat to create the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, essentially its internal think tank, except when Kennan was there it actually planned policy. (It hasn't since, but that's a story for another article.) In this role, Kennan was responsible for, among other things, the intellectual architecture of the Truman Doctrine (which, naturally, he later disavowed) and the Marshall Plan. Kennan's economic views were vaguely free-market but pragmatic. He strongly believed that markets should always serve higher ends, so goosing commerce for political purposes didn't bother him.

Kennan continued riding high as long as George Marshall remained secretary of state. But when the former general resigned, citing exhaustion, Kennan's new boss, Dean Acheson, was far less deferential to his advice. The two went back a long way and were friendly, but Acheson had less patience for Kennan's mostly long (not to say long-winded) intellectual expositions and preferred attacking problems head-on. Kennan, realizing that his star had dimmed, took a leave, eventually landing a spot at Princeton's highly prestigious Institute for Advanced Study (then home to Albert

Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, John von Neumann, and many other luminaries). Two years later, he was tapped to return to Moscow, this time as ambassador. But neither President Harry Truman nor Acheson gave him any instructions; to the contrary, they expected him to observe and report—and that's all.

But Kennan had grander ambitions. He was already grumbling that "containment" had been misinterpreted, a complaint he would press for the rest of his life. What he had intended, he now said, was not some semi-permanent posture of militarized vigilance but a forceful reset of U.S.-Soviet relations to convince the Kremlin that we were no patsies, followed by serious negotiations to defuse the crisis—to be conducted, naturally, by George Kennan.

In Moscow, he palmed every doorknob and found them all locked. He was, contradictorily, convinced that Soviet officials had the highest respect for him personally—and that their freeze-out of American officials and ubiquitous anti-American propaganda were targeted at him specifically. His frustration burbled over into an ill-advised (and, for someone with his experience, inexplicable) public comparison—in Berlin no less—of the Kremlin's silent treatment with his detainment by the Nazis a decade earlier. Kennan, already suspect in Moscow because of his role in shaping the Western response to the nascent Cold War, was, in diplomatic parlance, quickly "PNGed"—declared persona non grata—by Stalin himself and denied reentry into the USSR.

After a bit of flitting around western Europe, Kennan returned to Washington, naïvely expecting another big job. The new secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, abruptly informed him that there was "no niche" for him in the Eisenhower Administration, in part because, thanks to his Berlin gaffe, the Senate was unlikely to con-

firm him to anything. As consolation (and out of genuine respect), the new president made Kennan a key leader of the "Project Solarium" study group. Here, Kennan scored a kind of revenge on Dulles: the outcome of Project Solarium was to bury the secretary's favored strategy of "rollback" in favor of containment, which would remain American policy for the next 40 years.

But when the project ended, Kennan resigned from the Foreign Service after almost three decades, the vast majority of those overseas. He later returned to government, briefly, as President Kennedy's ambassador to Yugoslavia, but his unrealistic expectations—that he would somehow, from Belgrade, direct American Cold War policy and relations with the Soviets—were inevitably disappointed and he soon resigned, never to serve again.

Kennan spent the rest of his life dividing his time between Princeton, where he mostly wrote and lectured on diplomatic history under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Study, and his farm in rural Pennsylvania. He was twice courted by the Democratic Party to run for office, and wanted to do it, but backed out both times, citing financial concerns. One suspects, though, that given his disdain for ordinary people and their ordinary concerns, George Kennan would have made an unusually ineffective retail politician. He wanted to be elevated by acclamation, from which perch he could concentrate on foreign affairs and high statecraft without ever dirtying his hands with the grubby business of constituent service.

Kennan was something of a natural-born expatriate, always more at home overseas than in his own country. Whether this was the cause or an effect of his, if not anti-Americanism, certainly his contempt for ordinary Americans and their culture, is not easy to say. But Costigliola frequently quotes Kennan

railing in his letters or diary against the preferences and habits of his fellow citizens in language bound to repel patriots but appeal to the present ruling class. "More and more it is borne in upon me how little I have in common with, how little I belong to, this polyglot accumulation of people in the meridial part of North America." "I hate the 'peepul'; I have become clearly un-American."

I doubt this was Costigliola's intention, but the most interesting thing about his book is what it reveals about the differences between the ruling class Kennan was a member of and the one we're saddled with today. In the two decades since I began my researches, elite idolatry of the "Wise Men" and the order they helped create has only intensified. Few of their admirers seem to realize, or at least admit, that all of them would be canceled today for one or more offenses (or for just being white men), with George Kennan easily the most cancelable of all.

Costigliola mentions, and is at pains to apologize for (but never excuse!), Kennan's many, many anti-woke transgressions. At one time or another—and in most cases consistently over decades—George Kennan offended every present-day ruling class piety. He does not appear, to put it mildly, to have been overly enamored of Jews, Catholics, blacks ("ineradicable bitterness and hatred of the whites"), Chinese, Mexicans, Arabs, the Third World, immigrants generally, "inferior races," miscegenation, homosexuals—really, it would be easier, and take less space, to list out those who didn't repulse him. Not even his beloved Russia got off the hook: "a filthy, sordid country, full of vermin, mud, stench, and disease." Kennan was an early adopter of the allegedly discredited "Great Replacement conspiracy theory": he lamented the decline of old stock Protestant Americans into "not only a dwindling but disintegrating minority" and their replacement by a "sea of helpless, colorless humanity, as barren of originality as it is of nationality, as uninter-

esting as it is unoriginal—one huge pool of indistinguishable mediocrity and drabness."

The best Costigliola can do against this tidal wave of offense is sigh that Kennan's "racist, eugenicist views were stock in trade for his generation and social class." He also invokes the rebuke "orientalist" every time he quotes Kennan musing on the ethno-cultural traits of the Russian people. Still, if that's the lamest bit of woke jargon in a book published by an academic press—and it is—things could have been worse.

As to Kennan's views, well, Costigliola has a point that upper-class orthodoxy changed no less fundamentally than the composition of the upper class itself. Just about the only thing on which Kennan and his overclass successors agree is that the American people—meaning old-stock, middle-class "normies"—are awful. But even here I detect an important difference. George Kennan didn't so much hate his fellow Americans as he was perennially disappointed in them. Yet he thought they could be improved through some kind of forced return to a more idyllic American past—preferably overseen by a coterie of George Kennans invested with near-dictatorial powers. Such musings (expressed, it should be added, only in private) may have been ridiculous but at least they arose from genuine concern rather than malice.

The present ruling class, by contrast, does not appear to wish to improve the people but apparently seeks to make them worse. How else to explain policies that encourage poverty, joblessness, obesity, and illegitimacy? Or teaching children to hate their ancestors, their country, and themselves—and then encouraging them to self-mutilate while punishing parents who try to stop them? The government and its corporate allies have morphed into a kind of

nationwide crime syndicate pushing drugs, gambling, sexual degeneracy, and every imaginable form of vice. The next step on the road to national dissolution, it is now clear, will be expropriation, a.k.a., racial "reparations." One wonders what comes after all that money is spent on an attempt to square "the debt that can never be repaid"?

Especially in matters Kennan understood well, he thought the public should have no say. His diaries show that he was a keen reader of Alexis de Tocqueville, and while he never mentions this specific point, his insistence that foreign policy be conducted by the well born and well educated, without interference from the masses, echoes the French nobleman's argument that aristocracies are better than democracies at diplomacy. "[T]he 'people' have no idea what is good for them," Kennan declaimed, characteristically. This and (many) similar barbs clearly show that he was anything but an uncritical admirer of "our democracy." Yet at least Kennan was honest about his preference for expert rule; our present elites, by contrast, insist that their expert rule actually *is* democracy.

Skeptical as Kennan was of democracy at home, he was even more dismissive of its potential abroad. "The aptitude for democracy is not something just born into people," he wrote, but "has to attain the quality of habit." In perhaps the most risible passage in this biography, Costigliola cites these words as evidence of Kennan's prescience and then applies them only to…Poland and Hungary, which he characterizes as plagued by "authoritarian tendencies." Can't he think of any more apt examples of countries where democracy was recently tried and failed? Poland and Hungary, which have enjoyed more than three decades of free elections, would seem not to fit the bill.

Kennan scoffed at the idea that Russia in particular would or could ever democratize—and despite or because of this, he loved that country, its people, its culture, its literature, and its history, especially pre-1917. To a nontrivial extent, Kennan modeled his own life on what he read in Anton Chekhov, particularly *The Cherry Orchard*, which inspired him to buy his Pennsylvania farm. (As a young man, Kennan's highest ambition was to write a biography of Chekhov.)

Although Kennan despised the Soviet regime, he always insisted that Russia remained, underneath it all, fundamentally Russian—and therefore cautious, desirous of international respect, and open to negotiation. He saw his overarching mission in life as preventing war with Russia. The motive wasn't simply his Russophilia. In his travels immediately after V.E. Day, Kennan saw the devastation wreaked on German cities (in particular, Hamburg) by conventional munitions and was so unnerved that he vowed nuclear war must never take place for any reason. Every course he urged, every suggestion he made—the good as well as the bad—was intended toward this end.

Whether Kennan's plan all along really was to use containment as an initial clarifying smack that would open the path to a subsequent settlement is impossible to determine. What's clearer is that neither the Long Telegram nor the X Article easily supports that interpretation. Costigliola sympathizes with Kennan's second thoughts but declines to agree that his subject's carefully calibrated qualifications were, so to speak, present at the creation. To the contrary, Costigliola repeatedly chastises Kennan for overstating his case in 1946-47, thereby handing to others more hawkish than he the intellectual ammunition to justify an arms race.

Nonetheless, "contain; then talk" is the stance Kennan insisted he had meant from the beginning. It is, ironically, one of the few policy positions about which he was always consistent—at least after 1947—often to the (deserved) detriment of his reputation. Even when the Soviets were at their worst—in Budapest, Berlin, Cuba, and Prague—Kennan was sure talks would yield results.

The issue that did more than any other to convince the rest of official Washington that Kennan had become more liability than asset—and which especially roused Dean Acheson's ire—was his proposal (developed while he was still in government but advanced most forcefully in his 1957 Eastman Lectures at Oxford) that the United States withdraw west of the Rhine and support a unified, disarmed, neutral Germany. Kennan repeatedly asserted that doing so was the only way to avoid a nuclear World War III. That this was, incidentally, also the Soviet position might have opened Kennan to charges of disloyalty, but he somehow managed to remain personally untouched by McCarthyism, even as many of his friends saw their careers derailed, or worse.

There's no way to know what might have happened had this specific advice been heeded, but even though—or because—it wasn't, the Cold War ended in precisely the way Kennan in his glory years predicted it would. The Soviet Union, successfully contained, collapsed from a combination of external pressure and internal rot. When it did, Kennan not only didn't want credit, he resented the near-universal attempts to heap it upon him. He saw in all those accolades a rejection of his insistence over four decades that missed opportunities to negotiate squandered the chance to end the whole thing sooner. Kennan could never accept (and neither can Costigliola) that he had been right the first time.

It is here that we find Kennan at his most inconsistent. He de-

spised Richard Nixon—but what was détente and all its attendant treaties and agreements if not a Kennan-esque attempt to ease tensions, reduce the chances of war, and see a way toward peaceful coexistence? He dismissed 1975's Helsinki Accords, but what were they if not a shrewd trade—recognition of 1945 borders (a concession Kennan had long advocated) in exchange for commitments on basic rights—that over time undermined the Soviet grip on its wartime conquests and accelerated the Warsaw Pact's dissolution? Kennan had even greater contempt for Ronald Reagan—but what were Reagan's early arms buildup and tough rhetoric if not a deliberate tactic to throw the Soviets off balance so as to drag them back to the negotiating table? In other words, exactly the strategy Kennan protested he had meant by "containment" all along.

But by far the biggest problem today, right now, for our ruling class's Kennan idolatry is their hero's unapologetic counsel, persistent for more than seven decades, that American policymakers exert real effort to see the world through Russian eyes, recognize Russia's legitimate security interests, and come to terms with Russia as a peer with whom we have no choice but to coexist. Neither country can simply vanquish the other, Kennan insisted, and so neither should try. In particular, he explained that, rightly or wrongly, Moscow will always consider Ukraine integral to Russia and will never accept the loss of "the totally un-Ukrainian Crimean peninsula, together with one of the three greatest Russian naval bases." No less than, and well before, political scientist John Mearsheimer, George Kennan predicted that pushing NATO's border to the Ukrainian frontier would spark a crisis. In other words, he rejected in advance the Western policies that helped lead to the present war and he would almost certainly oppose the Western aid that keeps it going. If his track record is any guide, he would—as

ever—advocate peace talks.

Today's neoliberal Russophobic Kennanphiles are in a double bind, or would be, if they in any way valued consistency. The George Kennan they profess to admire was a consistent advocate of negotiation with Russia, something today's ruling class regards as equivalent to breaking bread with Hitler. The only way to marshal Kennan to their present cause of sticking it to Russia come what may is to resort to his '46-'47 hardline anti-Communism, which good liberals have long regarded as troglodytic, warmongering, and McCarthyite—and which, more to the point, Kennan himself carefully qualified for the second half of his life.

The key to the apparent paradox isn't very complicated, but grasping it seems beyond our rulers' reasoning powers. All you have to do is go back to the original documents and remember that Kennan argued that the sources of *Soviet* conduct were a combination of classic Russian state interest and Communist ideology. Take away the latter, and you're left with unadulterated Russianness. It was a staple of American Cold War policy and rhetoric that we had no quarrel with the Russian people but only with their murderous regime, which was a greater burden on them than on us. Is our government now determined to convince the Russian people that we were lying all along? At any rate, if the sanctified Kennan was right, that would mean that a non-Communist, less ideological Russia is today more amenable to talks than was Stalin in 1952, and at least as amenable as Leonid Brezhnev in 1972. So why aren't we talking?

Though it ought to be said that, while the present ruling class has a lot to learn from Kennan, its opponents could also learn at least one lesson from his long, often frustrating experience. His persistent desire to talk to the Russians was just as persistently re-

buffed. Time and again, Kennan assumed and hoped that his love of all things Russian and evident goodwill would bring the Russians around. One senses in some quarters of the new Right a similar Russophilia, some of it likely genuine, but some expressed more in the spirit of "the enemy of my enemy"—i.e., since the "globalist American empire" hates Russia, maybe Russia is my friend. But as George Kennan learned the hard way, writing love poems to Mother Russia is not by itself enough to unlock the Kremlin gates. It may be a shame, even a tragedy, that Russia's mistrust of the West is so high and that Russians fail to distinguish between Westerners bent on their country's destruction and dissidents who sincerely believe the West should back off. But, at least for the moment, it is and they don't, and one more mash note isn't going to change that.

All this doesn't come close to exhausting the myriad ways in which Kennan's expressed opinions run afoul of present orthodoxy. The go-to insult of today's national security clerisy is "isolationist," by which they mean anyone who questions the wisdom or value of even one overseas commitment or intervention. By this standard, George Kennan—patron saint of the liberal internationalists—was an isolationist. He believed that core American interests extended no further east than the Oder (if even that far), and to our west, the Sea of Japan—as Costigliola accurately summarizes, "the industrialized core of the Free World." Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, eastern Europe, most of Asia, even South Korea and Taiwan, Kennan thought "strategically unimportant." He believed that Franklin Roosevelt's vision for the United Nations had "no basis in reality." He opposed using American leverage to press European decolonization after World War II. He sought and got a change in U.S. policy to improve relations and establish military cooperation with Spanish dictator Francisco Fran-

co. He disagreed with Truman's recognition of Israel in 1948 and was never a fan of the subsequent U.S. alliance. He excoriated the Eisenhower Administration's abandonment of Britain and France during the Suez Crisis. He was skeptical of NATO at its founding, floated the idea of its dissolution after 1989, and vehemently opposed its expansion in the 1990s and 2000s. He railed against the "counter-culture," drugs, long hair, and the various '60s riots and attempted revolutions. He denounced as "unthought-through, vainglorious and undesirable" making democracy promotion a core aim of American foreign policy. And he worried about the negative effects of (legal and illegal) mass immigration on American political unity and cultural cohesion in terms little different from Samuel Huntington, or Sam Francis.

Kennan's curious mixture of hawkishness and dovishness, his reactionary impulses and utopianism, his hardheaded realism and airy romanticism, make him hard to summarize or classify. My tentative judgment is that he was a Machiavellian with an overdeveloped conscience. That is to say: clear-eyed and hard-headed about the cold realities of international relations and his country's true, core interests, but also sentimental and sometimes even soft about matters of genuine concern that are better addressed by recourse to that analytical coldness than to emotional appeals, however well-intentioned or deeply felt.

Politically, Kennan identified with and mostly served Democrats, but that may have been a function more of timing than anything else: his prime coincided with five consecutive Democratic presidential terms. He sought an appointment in the Eisenhower Administration and assisted there in an informal capacity, only to be rebuffed by Dulles. Apart from his perennial advocacy of negotiation and opposition to the arms race, about

the only issue on which George Kennan was consistently liberal was environmental conservation—which has always been at least as much a concern of the Right as of the Left. Indeed, Kennan's instinctual conservatism ran so deep that he was something of a Luddite. He lived to see the internet but said little about it. Judging from his lifelong disdain for machines and industrialization (he hated cars), he would have loathed Big Tech. As much as saying so would unnerve and anger his admirers and heirs—to say nothing of the haughty, quasi-aristocratic Kennan himself—it is not unreasonable to assert that the culturally conservative, economically ecumenical, anti-technology, anti-immigration, anti-intervention George Kennan shared more opinions with today's populist Right than with the contemporary Left.

And yet despite all this, apart from a little grumbling occasioned by the publication of his diaries, our ruling class still professes reverence for George Kennan. Though not for the *real* Kennan—the isolationist Russophile immigration hawk—but a Kennan reinterpreted on their terms: scourge of the Boomer-hated Vietnam war, thorn in the side of Nixon, Ford, Reagan and the two Bushes, despiser of the average Joe. The real George Kennan, one may say, has been contained.

But mostly our overlords still exalt Kennan because he was a key architect of the postwar liberal international order, which remains a core source of their strength and power. They eagerly tear down statues of their enemies' heroes; they know better than to deface one of their own.

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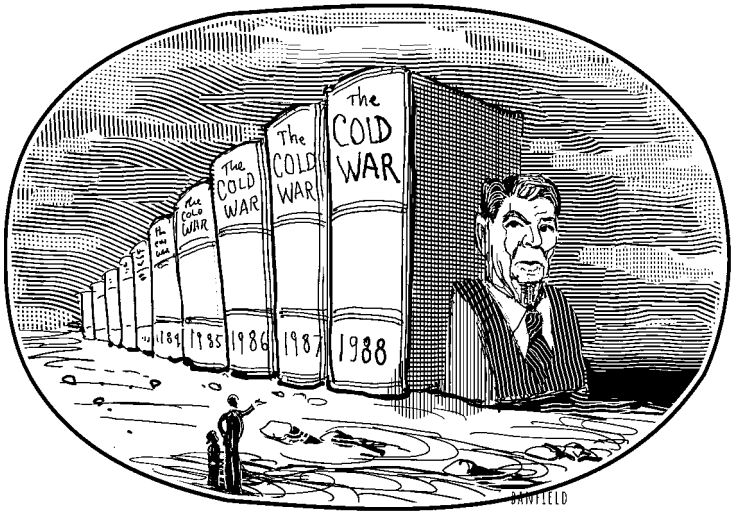

Book Review by Henry R. Nau

We Win, They Lose

The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink, by William Inboden. Dutton, 608 pages, $35

"Along with Franklin Roosevelt," writes William Inboden in his new biography, "Ronald Reagan was one of the two most consequential presidents of the twentieth century." An accomplished historian at the University of Texas at Austin, Inboden examines in *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* the sweep of events that enveloped the 1980s, concluding that, "just as Roosevelt rightly is regarded as the architect of American strategy in World War

II, Reagan oversaw the American strategy for the successful end of the Cold War. He brought the Soviet Union to the brink of a negotiated surrender."

That expression—"negotiated surrender"—is apt. Reagan armed with the intent to negotiate. As he told Pope John Paul II's representative in December 1981: "[We] could threaten the Soviets with our ability to outbuild them, which the Soviets knew we could do if we chose. Once we had established this, we could invite the Soviets to join us in lowering the level of weapons on both sides."

Reagan also armed to defeat the Soviet Union, not just to contain it. His goal for the United States, as he told his future national security adviser Richard Allen in 1977, was simple: "We win, they lose." But winning required neither a crushing military victory nor a preening triumphalism. Reagan wanted to defeat an idea, not a country. The Soviet Union surrendered because its system was broken. Reagan saw the USSR's crackup coming and refused to help hold the country together. He instead offered outcomes that benefited *both* superpowers—more open societies, arms reductions to curb excessive defense spending, and a booming global economy to ignite widening prosperity. Reagan sought a "negotiated" rather than an "unconditional" surrender.

Skeptics often attribute the end of the Cold War to favorable structural forces, which they say were emerging before Reagan became president. After a dangerous military buildup, they argue, Reagan recognized these forces and "reversed course" in 1984 to embrace arms control and détente.

Inboden flatly rejects this thesis, finding instead that Reagan outlined his plan in handwritten notes as early as 1963:

> If we truly believe that our way of life is best, aren't the Russians more likely to recognize that fact and modify their stand if we let their economy come unhinged so that the contrast is apparent? …In an all-out race our system is stronger, and eventually the enemy gives up the race as a hopeless cause. Then a noble nation believing in peace extends the hand of friendship and says there is room in the world for both of us.

Here was the dual-track strategy of unrelenting pressure and negotiating outreach that Reagan implemented some 20 years later. The "arm to negotiate" strategy was evident early on. At a National Security Council meeting in April 1982, Reagan said: "A vigorous defense buildup will also be a great help at arms control talks. The Soviets do not believe they can keep up with us."

The president was helped by the fact that Mikhail Gorbachev came along—his previous negotiating partners kept dying on him, he quipped. But Gorbachev was not the white knight who saved the day. As Inboden recounts, Reagan nudged structural forces to help bring Gorbachev to power and to the bargaining table.

Reagan's Soviet strategy, codified in NSDD-75 in January 1983, sought "to promote, within the narrow limits available to us, the process of change in the Soviet Union toward a more pluralistic political and economic system." Inboden argues that it was

> designed not only to exploit [Soviet] weaknesses, but to produce a reformist leader.… Each preceding US president had sought in different ways to contain Soviet expansion from without. None until Reagan had sought to erode the Kremlin from within.

This was prudent regime change, and it was totally new. When Poland's Communist government imposed martial law in December 1981, Reagan wrote the allies: "This may well be a watershed moment in the political history of mankind—a challenge to tyranny from within."

Inboden doesn't ignore Gorbachev's contribution to the Cold War's end but recognizes that he contributed mostly by what he did *not* do: use force to save the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union itself. What he did do—his attempts to reform Communism—failed. Reagan, by contrast, contributed mostly by what he *did* do, turning around the U.S. and world economies and sparking a global renaissance of free countries and markets.

Reagan linked force and diplomacy across his first and second terms. "He would first use the American buildup," explains Inboden, "as part of his multipronged pressure to weaken the Kremlin. Once the Soviet system began to crack and produce a reformer, Reagan would have a negotiating partner to join in reducing and then eliminating nuclear weapons."

How could the United States both win the Cold War and eliminate nuclear weapons? Inboden points to Reagan's enthusiasm for the Strategic Defense Initiative: "SDI was the apotheosis of the Reagan defense buildup." It was not a political gimmick or diplomatic bargaining chip but a military gateway to a more humane strategy of deterrence based on defending millions of lives rather than destroying them. And it was truly Reagan's initiative. No cabinet officers supported it initially. In his inimitable way, the president captured this complex idea in simple terms: "Wouldn't it be better to save lives than to avenge them?"

There were—and remain—unresolved issues with SDI. Was it technologically feasible? Could it be shared? How would you verify offensive missile reductions? What if nations opted out?

Inboden leaves these and other questions to further research. There is still much to learn, for example, about the Reagan economic revolution. Without the American and global economic revival, there would have been no Cold War victory.

William Inboden's contribution in *The Peacemaker* will be influential for years to come. Inboden writes felicitously with a gift for storytelling in an account peppered with succinct summaries and wise judgments. And he holds Reagan accountable for the good *and* the bad, including human rights violations in Latin America and the Iran-Contra affair. But his scholarship forces future biographers to draw their conclusions from the voluminous declassified files of the Reagan presidency that constitute the real "Reagan Record," not from the tiresome bromides of Reagan, the scripted movie actor. They will find that Ronald Reagan—not his staff or world events—was writing the script.

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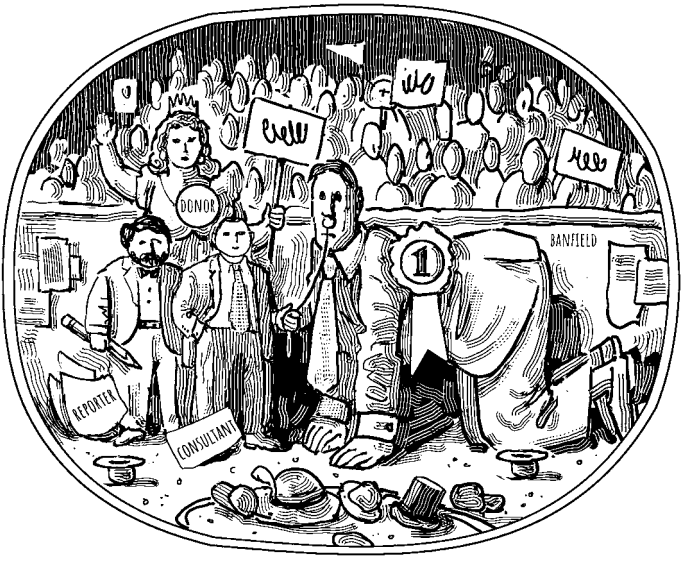

Essay by Jeffrey H. Anderson

Getting the Candidate We Deserve

Time to redesign the GOP presidential nominating process.

In his 1888 essay, "Why Great Men are Not Chosen Presidents," Britain's James Bryce wrote that "the ordinary American voter does not object to mediocrity." Yet by the time of Bryce's writing, less than one score removed from Abraham Lincoln's day, America had already produced eight presidents who Bryce said were "statesmen in the European sense" or who "belong to the history of the world." If Bryce could see the dearth of presi-

Books mentioned in this essay:

The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform, by Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. The University of Chicago Press, 416 pages, $30

Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition, by Jeane Kirkpatrick. American Enterprise Institute, 31 pages, out-of-print

Presidential Selection: Theory and Development, by James W. Ceaser. Princeton University Press, 392 pages, $75

Ratifying the Constitution, edited by Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch. The University Press of Kansas, 432 pages, $19.95

dents over the past half-century fitting either of those descriptions, he might recalibrate his assessment of earlier voters' expectations.

In recent voters' defense, however, they can hardly help pulling the lever (or licking the stamp) for mediocrity when our current presidential selection process serves up little else. It's hardly surprising, moreover, that this process was designed (to the extent it was designed at all) by the left wing of the Democratic Party. Republicans then adopted it without much debate. Nor should it be surprising that this ill-advised system hurts Republicans more than Democrats.

The current process is an outgrowth of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The New Left was frustrated because,

though Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy and New York Senator Robert Kennedy battled closely in the primaries, Lyndon Johnson's vice president Hubert Humphrey sat out those contests yet walked away with the nomination. He was the last nominee of either party to win the honor without entering a single presidential primary. Those dissatisfied with Humphrey's independence or moderation successfully pushed for a post-election review of party rules led by Senator George McGovern and Representative Donald Fraser. The McGovern-Fraser Commission sought to replace the old process for selecting presidential nominees, in which Democratic party leaders would decide on a nominee at the convention. Primary elections, previously regarded as non-binding recommendations to the convention from the electorate, became the deciding factor in choosing candidates. To the delight of party radicals and the dismay of party regulars, the first great success of the new rules was the nomination of McGovern in 1972, who went on to win one state and the District of Columbia. Republicans, not wishing to be seen as insufficiently "democratic," had already obligingly decided to follow suit.

Backing a Loser

The resulting system of direct primaries and caucuses was supposed to empower voters, but things haven't played out quite as expected. Political science professors Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller write in *The Party Decides* (2008) that "elected officials, top fundraisers, interest group leaders, campaign organizers, and ordinary activists" work to "scrutinize and winnow the field before voters get involved." This winnowing is sometimes called, somewhat delicately, the election before the election; sometimes more plainly the "money primary."

These power brokers unite "behind a single preferred candidate, and sway voters to ratify their choice." Their "control of campaign resources (money, knowledge, labor)" usually seals the deal, especially on the Republican side. The new system also greatly empowers the press, which decides how to portray candidates, what issues to amplify or mute, and when to assign momentum. As Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick observed in *Dismantling the Parties* (1978), written just a few years after the new system replaced the old,

> Advocates of the direct primary intended to wrest control from the bosses and return it to the people; presumably they did not intend to vest power in Walter Cronkite and other media moguls or to speed the development of a personalist politics with standards and practices more relevant to entertainment than to public affairs."

Increased media control hardly affects the two parties equally. Perhaps, then, it is not a coincidence that the system has prompted them to act in different ways. Republicans have shown a maddening tendency to default to the "next in line" candidate—the candidate they rejected the last time. Over the past 50 years of open primary battles (those without an incumbent president from the party in question), Republicans have gone with their next-in-line candidate—i.e., the runner-up in the popular vote during their most recent primary cycle not featuring an elected GOP incumbent—five out of seven times (71%). Over that same span, Democrats have gone with their next-in-line candidate just one out of nine times (11%).

On the flip side, four Democrats over the past half-century have basically come out of nowhere to win their party's nomination. As Gallup observed in the summer of 2007, Bill Clinton, Michael Du-

kakis, and Jimmy Carter "were all virtual unknowns who rose from obscurity to take their party's nomination." The next year, Barack Obama beat Hillary Clinton after serving just half a Senate term. Meanwhile, the only Republican who has come out of nowhere in the past 50 years—though he was hardly an unknown—was Donald Trump.

Four of the five out-of-nowhere nominees became president (only Dukakis lost), while only two of the six next-in-line nominees did so—with none winning since the 1980s. Suffice it to say that regularly elevating last time's loser over new blood hasn't served Republicans well. Nor has this merely been a product of conservatives' inherent discomfort with change. It wasn't the conservatives who picked Bob Dole, John McCain, and Mitt Romney. They were the picks of the donors, the consultants, the establishment—and the press corps.

Republican nominations follow a predictable pattern. As analyst Henry Olsen observed in 2014 ("The Four Faces of the Republican Party," *The National Interest* March-April issue), Republican voters consist of four "remarkably stable" groups: moderates or liberals (many of whom aren't even Republicans but vote in open primaries); "somewhat" conservatives; very conservative Evangelicals (plus some members of other religious groups who focus on social issues); and very conservative limited-government voters. The latter two groups make up the movement conservatives, but even combined they constitute only about a third of all voters in Republican primaries. In comparison, nearly half of the Republican electorate is made up of the "somewhat" conservatives—who, Olsen writes, "always back the winner."

That was true even in 2016, when Ted Cruz won both parts of the movement conservative vote, but Trump beat Cruz among less conservative voters. Trump may have gone on to govern as the

most conservative president since Ronald Reagan, and he certainly provided a welcome rebuke to a complacent, incompetent establishment. But even as an outsider, he won in the same manner as all prior nominees in recent decades—by winning among "somewhat" conservatives. He did so when the establishment failed to unite behind a single candidate in an inordinately large field, suggesting that his victory probably didn't mark a sea change in how Republicans select presidents. Rather, it was an aberration (an outsider victory by a non-politician) that nevertheless followed familiar patterns in terms of which voters cast the deciding votes. Those patterns are likely to continue.

Battle of the Unemployed

Although Trump and Romney are opposites in most respects, both, like McCain before them, were non-consensus (i.e., non-majority) picks. Trump won just 40% of the votes cast before Cruz dropped out, Romney 40% before Rick Santorum dropped out, and McCain 38% before Romney dropped out. About the only thing that McCain, Romney, and Trump have in common—aside from having effectively secured the nomination with far less than majority support, before Republicans in many states even got to vote—is that it's hard to find a Republican who likes all three of them.

By repeatedly nominating non-consensus candidates, Republicans reveal not only divisions in the party but also profound weaknesses in the current process. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln trailed badly on the first ballot at the GOP convention but picked up steam in subsequent votes as it became clear he was more of a consensus choice than the first-ballot winner, his eventual secretary of state William Seward. But the current process is effectively a

one-ballot process—although rather than being put forward for consideration by party leaders, candidates must now zealously put *themselves* forward over a two-year span.

This keeps many potentially strong candidates from running. To cite just a few examples: Representative Jack Kemp sat out the 1996 race because he didn't want to spend two years raising money. Representative Paul Ryan sat out the 2012 race, despite being Obamacare's most prominent opponent, partly because he trailed others in pulling together a campaign organization (thereby ceding the field to the man who launched the Obamacare prototype). And Senator Tom Cotton is sitting out 2024 because he doesn't want to engage in the two-year slog. Whether these men would have won or not, the campaign and party almost surely would have benefited from their articulate contributions to debates.

John F. Kennedy announced his candidacy on January 2, 1960, ten months before the election. Trump announced his latest candidacy on November 15, 2022, almost 24 months before the next election. This ever-lengthening process has had the strange effect of restricting the race mostly to candidates who are jobless—at least in a political sense. Over the past 30 years, of all candidates receiving even 1% of the Republican primary vote in open primary battles, 61% (14 of 23) didn't hold political office during the year of the election. Of the 39% who *did* hold office, almost all (seven of nine) were senators or House members—the next best thing to not having a job. Even though being a governor is arguably the best preparation for being president, only two sitting governors in the past 50 years have gotten even 1% of the GOP primary vote (George W. Bush and John Kasich). Over that span, no sitting cabinet secretary has reached the 1% mark. It's hard to run for president under the current system if you have real work to do.

Even governors who do run generally don't fare well, probably

for the same reason they often don't run. Scott Walker, who successfully took on Wisconsin's public-sector unions in a high-profile battle that gained national attention, was out of the 2016 presidential race by September *of 2015*. If Florida governor Ron DeSantis enters the 2024 race and does well, as it certainly appears he will, it will be because he overcame the challenges that this flawed system poses to anyone with a meaningful day job.

In short, Republicans are basically playing by the Democrats' rules, to their detriment. They are using a system that elevates donors, consultants, and reporters, while marginalizing the party's grassroots base. As a result, Republicans routinely end up with about the worst type of candidate: a non-consensus establishment moderate.

Back to the Grassroots

General election voters are typically no more impressed with such candidates than rank-and-file Republicans are. Since Ronald Reagan left office in 1989, Republicans' average performance in the electoral vote has been to lose, 312-225. Over that roughly 30-year span, the Democrats' *average* performance (winning 312 electoral votes) has beaten the Republicans' *best* performance (Trump's 304 in 2016). Meanwhile, the GOP has won the popular vote just once over that period (when George W. Bush managed 50.7% in 2004). It turns out that spending two years successfully courting Republican donors and "somewhat conservative" voters isn't a good predictor of general election prowess.

The old adage says that "the office should seek the man, not the man the office." Yet the current system fosters the opposite tendency, elevating the showman over the statesman. In *Presidential Selection* (1979), one of the best books on American politics in the past

half-century, political scientist James Ceaser laments "the failure of the selection system to offer any restraint or provide a moderating influence on the pursuit and exercise of power." Alas, the direct primary is here to stay—and it is not without its merits. The challenge, in Ceaser's words, is how "to reestablish the political party as a restraining and moderating force on political power, but in such a way that it can pass the test of modern standards of republican legitimacy."

Are Republicans really capable of establishing a nomination system based on reflection and choice? Or will they remain forever dependent upon accident and afterthought? None of the problems with the current nomination system can be solved by changing the order in which states vote, shrinking or expanding the calendar, or any of the other modest alterations intermittently floated. What is needed is a holistic overhaul. The new system must allow grassroots Republicans, rather than marginally conservative Upper East Side millionaires, to winnow the field. It must retain the primaries as the ultimate decider, but reinstate a meaningful convention; encourage consensus rather than mere centrism; and focus on nominating the most electable statesman who can do the job of preserving our constitutional forms and our American way of life.

In 2013, Jay Cost and I proposed in *National Affairs* ("A Republican Nomination Process," summer issue) that Republicans adopt a new nomination system based on how the Constitution was ratified. Such a system would combine the best of old and new. It would empower the Republican base and in the process revitalize the party, both as an electoral force and as a Tocquevillian civil association—which would strengthen it, in turn, as an electoral force. Taking into account the changes of circumstance that have occurred over the past decade, what follows is an updated, somewhat modified, and more practical version of our proposal.

On September 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention dele-

gates passed a resolution asking Congress to submit their proposed charter of government "to a Convention of Delegates, chosen in each State by the People thereof" to decide its fate. In *Ratifying the Constitution* (1989), Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch write that "more than seventeen hundred delegates, chosen in town meetings and local elections by tens of thousands of voters throughout the land, came together" in their respective states "to debate the new federal government."

Drawing upon that process, our plan calls for 3,000 delegates—an average of 60 per state and about one per county—to be chosen in town meetings and local elections by thousands if not millions of their fellow Republicans. Those 3,000 delegates, allocated based on the number of Republicans in each state and locality, would be chosen by rank-and-file Republicans and would meet at the inaugural Republican Nomination Convention. There, they would deliberate, debate, and decide which five candidates should be invited to compete for the Republican presidential nomination. A typical town of about 110,000 people would have a delegate, chosen in an election or town hall meeting conducted by a local chapter of the Republican Party. These 3,000 delegates would be supplemented by up to 600 additional delegates who would be party leaders or officials: governors, members of Congress, members of the Republican National Committee, and the like. More than 80% of the delegates would therefore be selected by their fellow citizens specifically for the purpose at hand.

A Real Contest

The convention would meet over a three-day period starting roughly five days after New Year's. The delegates would convene and take a series of votes. During each vote, dele-

gates would list up to five selections for their party's nominee, with their choices ranked 1 through 5. The first choice would receive five points, the second four, on down to one point for the fifth. If a delegate listed only two people, they would receive five and four points, respectively, and no other points would be awarded. All votes from this simple and straightforward scoring system would be tallied within an hour or two, with results released publicly for the ten people with the highest scores.

The first vote would occur early on the first day. Several hours after the initial results were released, the delegates would cast a second vote in identical fashion. Those results would be released late on the first day or very early on the second. Midway through the second day, a third vote would be taken in the same manner. This time, the ten proposed candidates with the highest scores would be notified and asked to declare before the end of the second evening whether they would accept the invitation to compete for the nomination if offered. Should anyone turn down the opportunity, the eleventh-highest-scoring person would be asked, and so on. Midway through the third and final day, the delegates would cast their final and decisive votes, in the same manner as their earlier votes, from among the ten proposed candidates who had confirmed interest. The final scores would then be released, and those with the five highest scores would officially be invited to compete for the party's nomination.

Two weeks later, those five candidates—and only those five—would participate in the first Republican presidential debate (held five months later than the first debate was held during the 2016 cycle). The five candidates would subsequently debate each other weekly until the nomination was decided. This would magnify the importance of the debates and correspondingly reduce the relevance of ads (and hence of consultants and donors). The debates would feature questions from conservative panelists: imagine, for

example, a debate moderated by Brit Hume with questions posed by Ben Shapiro, Mollie Hemingway, and Victor Davis Hanson.

Based on the past two cycles, the first contest would take place in Iowa during the first week of February, following the first two debates. The New Hampshire primary would occur a week later, after a third debate. The Democrats are currently seeking to reorder the primary calendar and place South Carolina first, while President Biden has called for eliminating all caucuses—the events where citizens get most involved—on the grounds that they are "anti-worker." The real motivation is that Biden did far worse in Iowa (fourth place) and New Hampshire (fifth place) than any prior nominee in the post-1968 era. But he won in South Carolina. It is by no means certain that Iowa and New Hampshire will be bumped from their customary spots, since Biden can't unilaterally decree this change and faces opposition both from Democrats in those states and from their Republican-controlled state governments. For purposes of this proposal, it doesn't really matter whether Iowa and New Hampshire go first, but voting shouldn't start before February 1 (later would be fine).

Primary voting would decide the nominee as it does now. Delegates (selected as now) would go to the summertime, made-for-TV convention to make that choice official. The presidential nominee would pick the vice-presidential nominee from among the four other finalists for the presidential nomination—and only those four. This would restore the party's role in ensuring that a desirable successor is waiting in the wings as necessary, thereby avoiding the kind of insider politicking that gave us Kamala Harris.

That's how the process would play out if there weren't an incumbent Republican president. If there were, the delegates' first course of action would be to vote on whether to support the incumbent as the nominee. A three-fourths majority would be required—a

threshold that would easily have been met by Reagan, George W. Bush, or Trump, but perhaps not by Gerald Ford or George H.W. Bush. If three-fourths support weren't obtained, the usual process of selecting candidates would then play out with the following exception: after the results were released from the second vote on potential candidates, the delegates would vote one final time, during the morning of the second day, on the question of whether to support the incumbent. This time, a two-thirds majority would suffice to throw the weight of the convention behind the incumbent and obviate any further consideration of other candidates.

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

This proposed system would offer numerous advantages both to Republicans and to the republic:

- *It would shift control to the party's grassroots.* The current system presents everyday Republicans with a field of candidates they have little to no role in determining. A choice among undesirable options isn't much of a choice. Since "somewhat" conservatives generally swing the process, it's crucial for grassroots Republicans to have a strong say in winnowing the field. Right now, that winnowing process is controlled by donors, consultants, and the press, none of whom share the base's goals. Returning power to the base would help the Republican Party in almost every conceivable way, starting by generating enthusiasm among its own voters.
- *It would combine the best of old and new.* The old convention system encouraged deliberation and the selection of a consensus nominee that most of the party could easily get behind. This proposal would reinstitute a meaningful and dynamic conven-

tion, encourage deliberation and consensus-building, and ultimately grant invitations to five candidates with strong appeal as finalists for the nomination—while preserving the right of voters ultimately to decide the outcome.

- *It would bring better candidates into the process.* Strong potential candidates, including many governors, cabinet secretaries, and even workhorse members of the Senate or House, often avoid the current two-year ordeal. The new process would only be about as long as that which JFK faced, rather than spanning half an Olympiad. Distinction and advancement would come from doing well in the debates, rather than from courting an army of high-powered donors and consultants in order to sustain a lengthy primary campaign. Sure, some candidates would continue to launch campaigns—some overtly, some discreetly—in advance of the nomination convention, in hopes of landing one of the five spots. That's fine. This process would nevertheless ensure that the party could choose among its best and brightest, rather than having only the most ambitious candidates, in combination with the richest donors, decide the finalists on behalf of the party.
- *It would produce more consensus nominees.* This would occur in two ways. First, the five finalists would almost certainly be more widely favored picks than the five de facto finalists who emerge under the current system, because no one could become a finalist without either being the first choice of a great many delegates or having broad appeal. Second, if it became clear that the frontrunner wasn't a consensus choice—as in the case of Seward versus Lincoln—it would be relatively easy for voters to unite behind a second- or third-place candidate who had more consensus appeal. This would make for a marked contrast to the present system, in which a lone establishment

candidate is generally left vying against several flawed, albeit more conservative, challengers.

- *It would allow more voters to have a meaningful say.* Not only do most voters now have essentially no say in whom they get to choose *from*, many don't get to choose at all until the race is effectively over. From 1972 onward, eleven of the 13 eventual Republican nominees have won in New Hampshire, while the other two have finished second there after winning in Iowa—in which case the race was effectively decided in South Carolina. Voters in the other 47 states were basically handed a done deal. But with five candidates all having emerged from the nomination convention buoyed by that vote of confidence, Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina would probably play out more like warmups than like the main events. In relation to the current system, each of the five finalists would already have won something and therefore wouldn't be so dependent on donors' whims, reporters' tales of momentum, or the verdicts of initial small states.
- *It would help revitalize the party.* Republicans supposedly believe in the sort of civil associations celebrated by Alexis de Tocqueville, yet they've let their own party stop functioning much like one. This proposal would help revitalize the party's state and local branches, as members would be actively involved in picking delegates to represent them at the nominating convention—and perhaps would even be under consideration to *be* such a delegate. Such revitalization, even on the margins, would help with get-out-the-vote efforts and would be an important end in itself.
- *It would save money to be redirected toward better ends.* The current process costs staggering sums, as large and small donors alike open their checkbooks for well over a year before even starting to focus on beating the Democratic nominee. For all of that money, the current process typically yields a non-consen-

sus centrist nominee who isn't ideally suited to win the election or govern if he does.

Nothing in this proposal is infeasible. If Republicans can't hold local elections for delegates like the founding generation could, if they can't stage a meaningful convention like prior generations did, if they can't have debates designed for Republican audiences and reallocate money that's now blown on a lengthy intraparty battle to beating the Democrats—then one must ask, why not?

It's time to redesign the Republican nomination system in a way that draws upon the process used to ratify the Constitution, reinstitutes a meaningful and deliberative convention, and preserves the right of primary voters to have the final say. In short, it's time for the Grand Old Party to embrace a presidential nomination system of its own design, rather than continuing to use a deeply flawed system designed by and for the Left.

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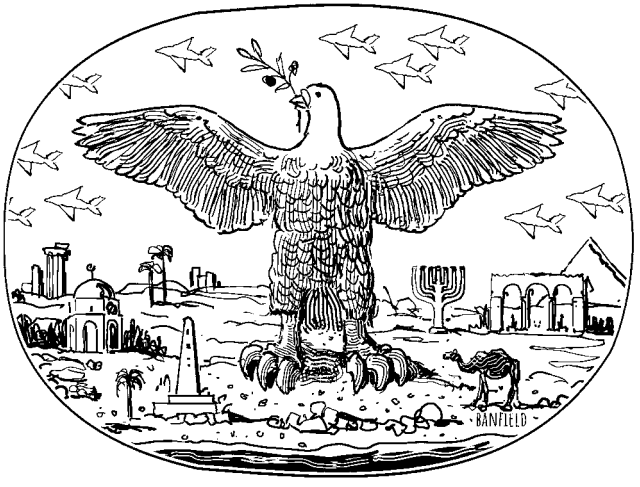

Book Review by Andrew Roberts

The Churchill of the Middle East

Bibi: My Story, by Benjamin Netanyahu. Threshold Editions, 736 pages, $35

Most politicians' autobiographies are turgid affairs. They tend to be written for the historical record, or for votes in the next election, or to prove that the author was always right about everything—three reliable avenues to literary failure. Because very often the authors' successes were won as the result of negotiation and compromises in anonymous committee rooms and dingy back offices, their memoirs struggle to convey drama: long speeches are reproduced; debates over long-dead issues are reheated; readers yawn.

Then there is Benjamin Netanyahu's autobiography, *Bibi: My Story*, which, as I realized around page 200, is not a politician's autobiography at all, but an adventure story dressed up as one. It is a Tom Clancy novel written for a Tom Cruise movie adaptation, *posing* as a normal politician's memoir. Yes, it has the photo of the author on the front cover and the requisite subtitle and the necessary width of a political memoir, but inside it is entirely different. Besides being a blood-and-guts page-turner more reminiscent of a film script than of the memoirs of Israel's longest-serving prime minister, it also deserves a place as one of history's great Zionist texts.

The book opens at Lod Airport near Tel Aviv in May 1972, where 94 passengers of a Sabena civilian aircraft have been hijacked by Black September terrorists. There had been no fewer than 326 hijacking attempts since 1968, and the civilized world was finally about to fight back. The elite Israeli special forces unit Sayeret Matkal—universally known as "the Unit"—stormed the plane disguised as mechanics, shooting the terrorists with Berettas and freeing the hostages. The reader's adrenaline rises as the account charges forward, with short paragraphs and no flummery. When the author is shot in the arm he explains, "I felt as if I'd been hit with a sledgehammer." The book then continues at this Jack Ryan pace, unputdownable, for several hundred more pages.

The fact that Netanyahu wrote the book himself and in longhand, sometimes during budget debates and while on the road electioneering, explains its immediacy. Political memoirs that are ghostwritten or, even worse, written by committee, are unreadable. By total contrast, this one feels as if it has hardly been edited and comes straight from the author's blue felt-tip pen. (Tony Blair also wrote his own memoirs longhand, which

explains why his are the best British prime minister memoirs of the postwar period.) Netanyahu despises words such as "paradigm" and "parameter" and what he calls "imprecise patter," and it shows in a book that doesn't feature a single imprecise sentence.

When he was asked in 2011 how he wanted to be remembered, Netanyahu replied, "That I helped secure the life of the Jewish state and its future." This book explains how he achieved that, but a surprising aspect of it—again, so unlike most political memoirs—is that much of the book is not really about himself, but about two other people who define him. It doesn't take a psychologist to work out the essential truth about what drives Netanyahu: despite his achievements and longevity in office in the infamously tough bearpit of Israeli politics, he considers himself to be only the third most impressive member of his immediate family. For here is a man who is acutely conscious of having constantly to live up to the extremely high expectations of his father, Benzion, and brother Jonathan "Yoni" Netanyahu. Since both are dead, they cannot tell him whether he has succeeded or not.

Benjamin Disraeli once said that he had been born in a library, and in a sense the same is true of his Netanyahu namesake. Professor Benzion Netanyahu was an eccentric, immensely learned intellectual who edited the *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* and was the foremost historian of the Jews in Spain. His son's stories of his absent-mindedness make him an endearing figure, but the greatest effect he had on the future premier was in his politics, for he had been an admirer of Theodor Herzl and personal secretary to Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement. The essential precepts of Revisionist Zionism—primarily the assertive self-sufficiency of the Jewish people in pursuit of their rightful historical homeland—are the lights that guide Benjamin Netanyahu to this day. Benzion was one of Jabotinsky's pallbearers, so there is

a direct apostolic succession from the founder of Revisionist Zionism to its present-day follower.

It is very clear from this book that the thoughts, hopes, fears, and dreams of Benzion Netanyahu pulsate through his son constantly, and form the bedrock of his beliefs. The last time that I have encountered such filial piety in a book was in Winston Churchill's two-volume biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, who arguably did not deserve it, having been a beast to his son. By contrast, Benjamin Netanyahu's devotion to his father was built on mutual love, admiration, and affection. Winston Churchill spent a lifetime trying to win the approval of his long-dead father, who had died at 45; Benjamin Netanyahu was more fortunate because Benzion lived to 102 and was therefore able to bestow approval on his son, although it came with severe admonitions to protect Zion from the Iranian nuclear threat.

Benjamin Netanyahu inherited the nickname "Bibi" from a cousin who was one of Israel's first air force pilots; it is used by friends and foes alike. The middle brother of three, he was also known in his family as "Akshan"—"the stubborn one"—a characteristic similarly noted by admirers and detractors. Although he is friendly and admiring toward his younger brother, Iddo—an academic and playwright who also served in the Unit—it is elder brother Yoni whom Bibi idolizes on a par with his father. "For my younger brother and me he was our North Star," Bibi writes, "guiding us through life's labyrinthine paths and serving as a model to be emulated."

The chapter of the book in which Yoni is killed leading the near-miraculous Entebbe raid on July 4, 1976 (an operation in which Israeli commandos dropped into Uganda's biggest airport at night to rescue another planeload of hostages from Palestinian hi-

jackers), is truly enthralling. Handsome, brave, charismatic, highly intelligent, and literary, Yoni Netanyahu won the Medal of Valor for heroism in the Yom Kippur War and remains the very *beau idéal* of manhood for a generation of Israelis today. His death at the moment of total victory at Entebbe is the Israeli equivalent of Admiral Horatio Nelson being killed at the battle of Trafalgar.

For Bibi, Yoni represents the perfect personification of the chivalric Renaissance gentleman-warrior, and it is abundantly clear that he daily strives to win the approval of his now long-dead brother. The fact that it cannot be bestowed in no way lessens the drive. That dynamic is central to this book, although the author himself seems unaware of it, or at least does not acknowledge it. The Churchill of the modern Middle East thus shares the psychological makeup of the real Winston Churchill, except in Bibi's case he has two family members to strive to impress and emulate, rather than just one.

Although Bibi had hardly a word of English up to the age of eight, by twelve he was elected class president in his American high school. (His family lived in the U.S. for a stint in the 1950s and again in the '60s while Bibi's father taught at Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning in Philadelphia.) "It was, I remember, astonishingly easy to get elected," he writes. "All you had to do was to be nice to everyone." He thereafter "devoured Machiavelli," something that not every politician would have admitted in their memoirs, and was taught how to fire an Uzi submachine gun by Yoni while still at school. Yet it was not at school or his subsequent time at MIT where his character was formed, but in the Unit, where "stragglers weren't tolerated." It was there that he came to recognize the importance of teamwork—there was a squad called "Team Bibi"—but also of

self-discipline, courage, and the self-confidence that derives from being a member of an elite. On the negative side of the equation is his chronic back pain, the result of having to carry 130-pound backpacks for miles during training and maneuvers, and the fact that even today, at 73, he finds it hard to sleep with anything covering his arms because of the Unit's training to be able to reach his rifle instantaneously.

Although the details of operations are necessarily still secret, it soon becomes clear that Bibi had some hair-raising moments serving in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), ones that cannot but have shaped his personality. He was attacked by giant cockroaches in a cave in the Negev Desert, very nearly drowned in the Suez Canal, blew up Lebanese planes on the tarmac of Beirut's airport, had a comrade die in his arms, survived two serious car crashes, led Team Bibi through what he believed was a minefield, and was bitten on the neck by a scorpion. Of an occasion when he nearly died of hypothermia on Mount Hebron, he writes: "If anyone was silly enough to urinate while climbing, that extremity would freeze as well!" In all the operations he himself commanded, however, he never lost a man. What he learned from all these adventures was that "[t]he distance from triumph to tragedy was often only a few centimeters wide."

As is often the case when soldiers turn into politicians, his experiences made him reluctant to resort to military solutions except as a last resort. The comrade who had died in his arms was called David, and he recalls how, "[w]hen as prime minister I sent men into battle, I would always think of David's mother and the other mothers of Israelis grieving for their fallen sons." It hasn't of course prevented him from adopting the military resort several times in his long career, and one suspects now that he has become prime minister yet again there could be more such occasions. But no one

reading this memoir will believe that he is the gung-ho warmonger of his opponents' demonology.

There are a number of good jokes in this book—one footnote points out that Bibi's grandfather Benjamin "Simon" Segal was "no relation to the infamous Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel"—but also many moving passages. "Time and again we had come back from the dead," Netanyahu writes of the Jewish people,

> most recently from the worst horror ever inflicted on any people. I was part of the new generation of Jewish children coming into its own in the Jewish state a mere few years after the slaughter of a million and a half Jewish children in the Holocaust. This was anything but normal. It was miraculous.

It was Bibi's period at MIT from 1972 to 1976 that turned him into a free marketeer. He approached economics not from a philosophical, or even political, point of view, but through the prism that his father had always emphasised: Zionism. In order for Israel to be strong enough to survive in a region packed with mortal enemies, she needed a large and well-equipped army, the huge expense of which had to be borne by Israel's then sclerotic socialist economy. At MIT, Bibi learned how "military intelligence, academia, and business clustered together and working in tandem" might provide the wherewithal for a strong IDF.

For Israel's never-ending existential crisis, Bibi reckoned, a strong economy was a precondition for survival, and he became convinced at much the same time as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—both of whom he later met—that free-market economics were key to turbo-charging Western economies. "You couldn't have effective defence without unleashing individual initiative,"

Netanyahu told Peter Robinson on the Hoover Institution's *Uncommon Knowledge* program while publicizing this book.

Bibi's struggle as finance minister between 2003 and 2005 to deregulate and privatize the Israeli economy took place against forces well entrenched in Israel's civil service, trade unions, academia, and Knesset, but employing his high-school knowledge of Machiavellian political skills, tremendous powers of oratory, knowledge gleaned from reading free-market thinkers, and a belief in the Laffer Curve, he pulled off a transformation in the Israeli economy.

Economic success transformed the fortunes of the Likud Party, to the extent that Bibi is presently the longest-serving leader of any democratic country in the world for the past 58 years. Even though he was first elected when Bill Clinton was in the White House, Bibi became prime minister again on December 29 last year. Even his political opponents' attempts to mire him in legal battles over alleged corruption failed to prevent the Israelis from reelecting him to an unprecedented sixth term as prime minister.

In a passage that Iran's rulers ought to take to heart, Bibi criticizes Golda Meir for not pre-empting the Arab attacks on Israel in the Yom Kippur War, in the same way that had happened in the Six Day War seven years previously. "Pre-emptive action is always a difficult decision for political leaders because they can never probe what would have happened if they hadn't pre-empted," he writes. "Nevertheless, faced with a life-threatening challenge, Israel should always put its security first and when necessary—strike first. The alliance with the US will take care of itself." He adds, I hope correctly, that "[m]ost Americans, including their presidents, understand that when push comes to shove, Israel must do what is necessary to defend itself."

"We are a people of hope," writes Bibi.

> Our national anthem, Hatikva, means hope. Without hope we would never have been able to rise from the ashes of the Holocaust and re-establish the Jewish state…. The real foundation of peace in our area is hope that derives from strength, and the consequent realization by our neighbours that Israel is here to stay.

The endpapers show a map of all of the four Arab countries that signed the Abraham Accords in 2020, which finally, after three quarters of a century of Israel's existence, did reflect a realization by at least some of Israel's neighbors that she was there to stay. Saudi Arabia even allows commercial overflights to and from Israel.

This book is packed with good throwaway lines, such as this one about how to perform well on television shows such as *Nightline*: "TV favors cool over hot." Israel's Iron Dome defense weapon is described as "a bullet hitting a bullet in the sky." Overall, however, it is the superb Zionist one-liners that will come to be featured in future editions of the *Oxford Book of Quotations*. Thus, when Palestinians and their apologists complain about the Nakba refugee "catastrophe" of 1948, Bibi writes, "There wasn't a single Arab refugee when six Arab armies set out to destroy fledgling Israel at its birth." A short historical interlude covering three millennia proves how "[t]he Jews are the original natives, the Arabs the colonists." He describes terrorism as: "Just totalitarianism reborn, metastasizing. The terrorists neutered man's sense of sin," and argues that "[t]heir choice of means reveal what their true aims are," meaning further genocide. His prescription for speaking at the United Nations is to "[b]e concise, avoid jargon, forget diplo-

matic niceties, refer to broader interests, make one main point."

All five of those practices are present in this memoir, and the main point he makes is that in seeking to weaken Israel and force it to make peace with the Palestinians, the world has been pursuing an entirely wrong agenda, for only a supremely strong Israel can do that. "The road to a broader Middle East peace between Israel and the Arab world did not go *through* the Palestinian seat of government in Ramallah. It went *around* it." Only when the Palestinians themselves recognize this can there be a genuine and durable peace. "Palestinian politics are hopelessly mired in their extremist fantasy of annihilation," Bibi writes. "And there is always a Palestinian faction to out-Hamas Hamas." The Abraham Accords prove that four Arab countries finally appreciate this.

As in any political memoir, there is a certain amount of point-scoring and score-settling in this book, but considering the avalanche of contumely that has been directed at its author over the decades, it is not excessive. Bibi was once accused of being a CIA agent code-named "John Sullivan" because his U.S. social security number was registered in that name rather than under Benjamin Netanyahu. It was not until after weeks of accusations that an enterprising journalist finally proved it had been a bureaucratic mix-up and tracked down the real John Sullivan, a retired mailman living in Vermont.

Although there are excellent pen portraits of Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Shamir, and several other Israeli politicians, Ehud Barak will not be happy with the way he is portrayed in relation to the Sabena operation at Lod Airport, as "a bystander. His only role in storming the plane was standing on the tarmac and blowing a whistle. Four of his decorations were given not for leadership under fire but for intelligence gathering operations." Ouch!

Bibi: My Story has inevitably drawn criticism, largely as a way of attacking Bibi himself. One reviewer described the West's longest-serving leader as having a "rather childish" view of the world; another accused him of McCarthyism for daring to criticize the *Economist* magazine; a third said that the book was "self-serving," which is hardly unknown in memoirs. The review in the *Times Literary Supplement* highlighted Bibi's supposed "narcissism, suspiciousness, deep-seated pessimism and distinct lack of emotional generosity," despite the fact that the exact opposite of each of each of these traits is prominently displayed in this book (except suspiciousness, which is a prerequisite in his job).

When reviewing a book of Yoni's posthumously published letters, Herman Wouk wrote, "The lands of the free shall need such men until the day when the last tyrannies that spawn the terrorists are faced down." That day is clearly still a long way off, but Bibi Netanyahu is nobly carrying on his late brother's work, which would not have surprised Yoni, who predicted when Bibi was 18 that he would one day become prime minister of Israel. In his third speech to the U.S. Congress, in 2015, Bibi defiantly stated that, in relation to the Iranian nuclear threat, "Even if Israel has to stand alone, Israel will stand!" It was as pure a statement of Revisionist Zionism as can be imagined, and no one, not even his worst enemy, could be in any doubt of Bibi's complete sincerity. Benzion and Yoni Netanyahu would be proud.

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Book Review by Spencer A. Klavan

One King to Rule Them All

King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great, by Matt Waters. Oxford University Press, 272 pages, $27.95

Late one night in 556 B.C., King Nabonidus of Babylon saw the gods in a dream. He had just inherited a majestic but precarious birthright: the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was an object of constant territorial dispute. Some part of it was always under siege, claimed by ancestral inhabitants or trod underfoot by roving warlords. The duty of the *Šar Kiššati*—the king of the world—was to impose his glorious order upon this chaotic landscape. That daunting assignment now fell to Nabonidus, in whom the gods naturally took an interest.

Turning to them in trepidation, Nabonidus complained of a fearsome menace that had lately disturbed the peace. The *umman-manda*, the "hordes from who-knows-where," were stalking like blood-streaked ghosts through his kingdom. In Babylon's Akkadian language, *umman-manda* was an all-purpose slur for any foreigner that threatened to destabilize the governing regime. In this case it was being lobbed at the Medes, whose swift horses carried them at alarming speeds from their base camps in the Zagros mountains to whatever city they chose to claim. But Marduk, king of gods, had a surprising revelation for Nabonidus: "That Mede you mentioned—he, his country, and the kings who march at his side shall be no more." Nabonidus had this story written down on a fired clay cylinder and deposited in Sippar, just north of Babylon. The "Sippar Cylinder" heralds a rival conqueror on the make: Cyrus of Anshan, a Persian, ruler in what is now Iran's southwest-

Cyrus Restoring the Vessels of the Temple. Engraving by Gustave Dore

ern province of Fars. This unlikely champion would soon bring the proud Median riders low.

Not that Nabonidus should have felt altogether reassured by this news. He may justifiably be suspected of having backdated the prophecy of Cyrus' victory over the Medes, fabricating *ex post facto* foreknowledge about a shocking turn of events. But neither Nabonidus nor anyone else could have even pretended to predict what Cyrus would do next. Media was only the beginning: stretching his borders to the western coast of Lydia in modern Turkey, Cyrus ultimately deposed Nabonidus himself to become ruler of Babylon. At its height, the realm Cyrus founded—now known as the Achaemenid Persian empire—covered a breathtaking two million square miles. The sheer scale of his dominion was unheard of. By the time he died in 530 B.C., Cyrus II of Persia, once an obscure disputant in the hinterland dreams of greater kings, had more right than any man before him to be called King of the World.

This riveting life story is summarized in Matt Waters's new biography, *King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great*. A professor of languages and history at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Waters has been poring meticulously over the surviving documents from ancient Persia for 25 years. His 1997 Ph.D. dissertation was about the Elamites, precursors to the Persians who staged a doomed rebellion against Assyria's military dictatorship until Assyria crushed them in the 640s B.C. Waters then condensed his study of the Persians' later expansion into *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire* (2014). Now he has put together a careful but readable account of what we know about that empire's charismatic founder.

It turns out we know more than we used to, and it's more complicated than it used to be. Only since the 19th century, with the

genesis of modern archaeology, has the dust of centuries begun to clear from Babylon and the other great capitals in its vicinity. Among these are the Elamite city of Susa, the Assyrian palaces at Nineveh, and Cyrus' own lavish royal gardens in his homeland at Pasargadae. The written records that are still emerging from these imposing strongholds—records like the Sippar Cylinder—help reveal how the history of the ancient Near East looked to those who made it.

Before excavations began in earnest, anyone interested in Cyrus or his empire had to content himself more or less with unraveling the cryptic allusions of Hebrew prophets and the reports of Greek historians. The average schoolboy's picture of the Persian Empire would have been formed, until recently, by what Herodotus of Halicarnassus could gather as he wandered from his birthplace on the western fringes of Persia's domain. The physician Ctesias of Cnidus also left behind a patchy record of his work in the same region, and the philosopher Xenophon brought back grand tales from his adventures among the mercenary forces of Cyrus' distant progeny. These writers will always be indispensable: as Waters explains, "we still rely on the Persians' contemporaries, the ancient Greeks, for narrative material describing what they knew, or thought they knew, about Cyrus." But the story can now be approached from another angle via the wedge-shaped, i.e., "cuneiform" markings that the scribes of the great kings pressed into brick and clay.

Waters does his best to sort through these various testimonials without forgetting the romance and excitement of the story he has to tell. He always shows his hand, laying out the materials he's working with and explaining how far each of them can be relied upon. This is, as he puts it in a winning act of understatement, "a tricky business, or at least a

convoluted one." The result is not quite as seamless or stylish a narrative as the average reader might hope—those interested in something more polished, though also somewhat more controversial, could turn to *Persians* (2022) by Cardiff University's Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. Waters takes a more circumspect approach. But he makes sure to pause regularly in appreciation of his subject's awesome grandeur, and those who bear with his many professions of uncertainty will discern the profile of a figure who remains no less captivating for being somewhat enigmatic. Even through the haze of imperfect cultural memory, at a distance of 2,500 years, Cyrus does not fail to dazzle.

His early days were already shrouded in mystery by the time Herodotus started poking around the scene in the later 5th century B.C. Waters suggests this was by design: "Cyrus had an effective publicity machine that worked hard, and was successful, at legitimizing Cyrus within multiple long-standing traditions." Herodotus was well aware that the monarchy's public relations team would have been putting in overtime on such a delicate subject as the Great King's humble beginnings. So he did his best to track down "those Persians who prefer to say how things really are rather than wax reverential about Cyrus" (*Histories* 1.95). He looked for skeptics whose resentments, or mere indifference, would inoculate them against Cyrus' cult of personality. This clever tactic put Herodotus well on his way toward the invention of journalism. In the immediate term, though, the best he could do was choose the least fantastical option from among four variant origin stories. The version of events he chose, though perhaps less fawning than the alternatives, was clearly indebted as much to popular mythology as to historical reality. Already in the century after his death, Cyrus' mystique was such that even his critics were forced to treat his youth as the stuff of legend.

The story went that King Astyages of Media dreamed his daughter Mandane drowned all of Asia in her urine. Fearing that her issue would usurp him and rule the continent, Astyages had Mandane married off to a nobody, Cambyses I of the "inferior" Persians—technically a king, but little more in practice than a tribal chieftain. The bad dreams didn't stop, though. So when Mandane gave birth to Cyrus, Astyages had his trusted subordinate Harpagus carry the child off for summary execution. As Waters wryly observes, "[T]he reader knows where this goes." Harpagus, apparently discerning what narrative convention required of him, had the child raised in secret by a shepherd. This treachery discovered, Astyages welcomed Cyrus back into his household but punished Harpagus gruesomely, feeding him a supper that turned out to consist of his own murdered offspring. With almost superhuman composure, Harpagus kept quiet—for the time being. He "swallowed…his own anger" along with his children's flesh, Waters writes. Silently nursing his outrage, Harpagus bided his time.

At this point page-turning mythology overlaps with world-changing history in a compelling fashion. According to the legend, Harpagus signaled covertly to the young Cyrus that should his ambitions outgrow the confines of the Median court, he would find willing allies among those closest to the king. Cyrus, as Waters writes, "did not require much convincing." What happened next is independently confirmed on a clay tablet from Babylon, containing a text written around the turn of the 5th century B.C. The "Nabonidus Chronicle" states bluntly that "the army of Astyages rebelled, and he was taken prisoner. They delivered him to Cyrus."

This relatively terse and dispassionate report indicates that Herodotus' disaffected Persians got at least a few things right. Apparently Cyrus did indeed take advantage of internal discontent to

seize control of Media. The Nabonidus Chronicle doesn't elaborate on his methods. But probably Cyrus presented himself as a competent and likable alternative, if not to governance by forced cannibalism, then at least to a king whose policies had not endeared him to the local nobility.

For the rest of his life, this kind of conquest-by-ingratiation would be Cyrus' signature technique. It was a stark contrast to previous imperial efforts in the area, which had not been marked by clemency or restraint. The Assyrian monarchs, especially, asserted their dominance over competitors by way of total annihilation. King Ashurbanipal of Assyria kept annals describing, with evident relish, how he salted the earth of his enemies' lands and defiled their most sacred places. So when the Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612, the Jewish prophet Nahum remarked that no one seemed all too broken up about it: "Nineveh is laid waste; who will mourn her?" (Nahum 3:7).

In an age when it was not unusual for kings and their courtiers to feast in full view of their enemies' severed heads, the bar for winning popular support was low. Any conqueror who used force sparingly, rather than gleefully, could hope to be greeted by his new subjects as a liberating hero. This was one of Cyrus' cardinal strategic insights. Wherever he went, he made efforts to present himself as a gracious administer of justice rather than a vengeful destroyer of worlds. He kept regional customs in place and appointed representatives (satraps) from among the local gentry, leaving their power more or less intact in exchange for fealty.

Scorched earth tactics in the Assyrian mold never vanished from his field manual altogether, though. When the Lydian nobleman Pactyes revolted, Cyrus had him and his supporters hunted down unsparingly, *pour encourager les autres*. In Waters's words,

this calculated display of force "demonstrated the consequences of rebellion or recalcitrance." But except in cases of outright insurrection, Cyrus understood that threats of violence would be more effective the more tacit they remained. He preferred to win hearts rather than stop them from beating.

Nowhere was this approach more successful than in Babylon, the crown jewel of both his military and his political career. By the time he marched on the city in 539 B.C., Cyrus' many campaigns had put him in a position to make a serious bid for total control. If he faltered now, he could lose everything. But if Babylon should kneel before him, who could stand? As it turned out, the city only needed a push. Taking his troops south toward the Tigris River, Cyrus met Babylonian forces at Opis, near modern Baghdad. He won that engagement handily and then, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle, entered Babylon itself "without a battle." Herodotus describes a more protracted siege, though with the same definitive result. According to his sources, Babylon's famously vast outer fortifications were so distant from the city center that the downtown crowd could go on "dancing and carousing" in blissful ignorance while Cyrus' invading armies swept through the far-off gates (*Histories* 1.191).

It's a fanciful but telling detail. In truth, the dancing and carousing may well have been performed not in ignorance of Cyrus' entry, but in celebration of it. In his inimitable style, Cyrus saw that a display of peace and reconciliation would make him look like the good guy. Nabonidus was often away from the capital for long stretches of time, pursuing obscure antiquarian interests and even attempting to elevate the moon god Sin at the expense of the imperious Marduk. Betting that the people were uncomfortable with these theological innovations on the part of an

absentee king, Cyrus announced that he had come to put the pantheon to rights. In a proclamation called the Cyrus Cylinder, which Waters translates in an appendix, he presented a gauzy picture of himself as the people's savior from a generation of neglectful and blasphemous leadership. Marduk, out of pity for humanity, "took Cyrus by the hand, the king of Anshan. He summoned his chosen one; he named his name to rule over all."

It was almost too easy to fill out the details of this triumphal narrative: Nabonidus, the senile madman, was cast into gibbering ignominy by Cyrus, heaven's chosen one. But though plenty of expert branding was involved, these advertisements for Cyrus' rule were not pure fiction. As historian Tom Holland writes in his gripping *Persian Fire* (2007), Cyrus "had shown himself far more sensitive to the alien and complex traditions of Mesopotamia, and to the potential they might offer his regime, than Nabonidus had ever done." People craved stability. Cyrus knew that if he offered it, a lasting empire could be his in return.

A simple enough observation, but a groundbreaking one with countless potential applications. As Machiavelli noted in *The Prince* (Chapter 6), Cyrus "owed nothing to fortune except opportunity, which provided material to mold into whatever form seemed best." Empires in the region tended to fall from within, weakened steadily by infighting until some enterprising invader brought it all crashing down. This had been going on for centuries, but it took a man of Cyrus' unique genius to see the opportunity it presented—an opportunity not only for military vigor, but also for good governance. "Under Cyrus," declares the Athenian statesman in Plato's *Laws*, "the Persians found the right balance between servitude and freedom" (3.694a-b). Bound to their leader by terms of endearment as well as obligation, his Persian subjects loved and feared him in equal measure. Even the leading lights of Athens, whose forebears

had to fight a grueling war of independence against his successors, looked back with appreciation at Cyrus' industry and wisdom.

Because his virtues were fundamental ones, they could win over almost anyone. The Jewish exiles he found living in Babylon—no less than the Greek sojourners at his court—had good cause to admire him. They had been torn from Jerusalem and deported into hateful captivity decades earlier by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II. "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept" (Psalm 137): this signal catastrophe was a cruel mockery of the Holy Land and a fearsome indictment, the prophets said, of its leadership class. Still, "the Lord will not nurse his anger forever" (Psalm 103). Since it was Cyrus' practice to keep traditional customs in place and restore them where broken, he allowed the exiles to return home and rebuild their ruined temple. For this reason the God of the Israelites agreed with Marduk of the Babylonians in one and only one particular: Cyrus was heaven-sent. "Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whom I have grasped by his right hand," declares the prophecy of Isaiah: "'I will go before you, to straighten out the bent and twisted places'" (Isaiah 45:1-2). The word in Hebrew for "his anointed" is "*m'shichu*," i.e., "his messiah." Even if unwittingly, Cyrus became a favored agent of the universe's one true king.

The respect in which he was held by Athens and Jerusalem alike makes Cyrus an instructive object lesson for our times. It has become fashionable to insinuate that Western historians often distort or ignore the history of the East out of cultural prejudice. Waters himself indulges in a few passing comments along these mistaken lines, blithely indicting "Western historical traditions, with echoes of colonialism." It's a shame he vitiates his otherwise expert scholarship with this reflexive over-generalization, since his

own research points toward quite a different conclusion. People being what they are, any encounter between two or more cultures is bound to involve some suspicion and outright animosity on all sides. But frequently, as Waters's book shows, Western researchers have been eager and glad to learn as much as they could about Cyrus.

After all, it's not as if Herodotus had access to some inconvenient Persian or Babylonian chronicles which he swept under the rug to preserve an appearance of Greek superiority. That would have been entirely out of character. He would have been *delighted* to get his hands on a transcript of the Cyrus Cylinder, or any of the other precious records that are now emerging from the embattled archaeological sites of the ancient Near East. As more records emerge, it only becomes clearer that Western observers, even when they had incomplete information, could recognize Cyrus' essential qualities from miles away. Of course he was no classical liberal, and Waters rightly notes that modern efforts to dress him up as some "father of human rights" are sentimental anachronisms. But the virtues he possessed—courage and prudence, a sense of justice and a respect for tradition—are perennial. As some of the West's best thinkers have powerfully argued, human excellence is objective and universal, though its expressions are as various as the circumstances in which it is displayed. That is why Jews and Greeks alike could see, from their very different standpoints, that Cyrus should be counted among history's greatest men. We inheritors of the West, two and a half millennia later, can see it too.

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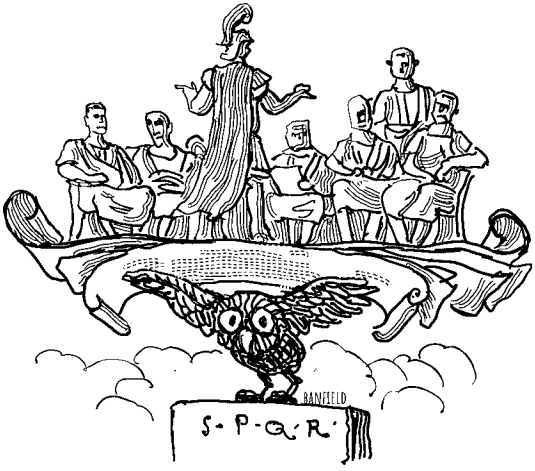

Book Review by Joseph Epstein

Lend Me Your Ears

The Roman Republic of Letters: Scholarship, Philosophy, and Politics in the Age of Cicero and Caesar, by Katharina Volk. Princeton University Press, 400 pages, $35

"Captive Greece has conquered her rude conqueror," wrote Horace, the assumption here being that, through Greece's vastly richer culture, adopted over time by the Romans, Greece ultimately defeated Rome. Philosopher for philosopher, historian for historian, playwright and poet for playwright and poet, there is little doubt that Greek culture was deeper than, and in almost every way superior to, that of the Romans. No Roman philosopher was anywhere near the equal of Plato and

Aristotle. Nor could Rome produce playwrights of the quality of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Juvenal couldn't lay a glove on Aristophanes. Livy was nowhere near Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon, though Tacitus, true enough, was of their company. The *Aeneid* was no *Iliad*, and Horace not quite the poet Pindar was. Romans with the wherewithal repaired to Athens to put the polish on their own education.

Yet the Romans were distinctive in having an upper class, their senatorial class, that not only had a serious interest in culture but found the time, alongside its political duties, to produce it, especially in the last years of the Roman Republic. (While the Roman senate was in session, it was said, Cato read from a book hidden under his toga.) This Roman cultural efflorescence is the subject of Katharina Volk's *The Roman Republic of Letters: Scholarship, Philosophy, and Politics in the Age of Cicero and Caesar.* Surveying Roman political and intellectual life between 63 B.C. and 43 B.C., the year after the assassination of Julius Caesar, her interest, as she notes, "is in what my protagonists 'were thinking' at the time. If in the end a somewhat larger diachronic tale does emerge, I believe it will be less abstract and messier and more diverse than other stories that have been told before." A professor of classics at Columbia University, Volk hones in on the fact that "some of the most important political actors in this time of turmoil also engaged in significant scholarly activity"—and often did so with a sense of communal effort.

This Roman combination, the mixture of high-level politics and serious scholarship, is unique. Certainly it does not show up in contemporary American politics, where pretensions to scholarship, or even to intellectual activity, are rare if not invisible. In recent decades, when speechwriters and staff do much of the work of American political figures, gauging the in-

tellectual quality of our politicians is no easy task. Think of John F. Kennedy, who did have such pretensions but whose *Profiles in Courage*, winner of the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for biography, turned out to have been researched and written by others. Ask not who authored *Profiles in Courage*, but ask instead who merely "authorized" it. About the only American politician over the past half-century or so with intellectual distinction was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, though he wrote chiefly on current-day domestic politics.

Volk takes up the scholarly and philosophical contributions of Julius Caesar, Marcus Terentius Varro, and Publius Nigidius Figulus, but it is Cicero who dominates her pages. Although Cicero was unfortunate in life—a life that featured many political disappointments and ended with his beheading by Mark Antony's henchmen, who then nailed his head and hands up for display in the forum—he has had a strong posthumous run, owing to so much of his work having survived. Not only do we possess more of his writings and speeches than those of any other Roman but more than 800 of his letters are extant. "The Ciceronian corpus," Volk writes, "provides a large portion of our evidence for the intellectual life of the period."

In life and after death, Cicero has never been without his critics. Perhaps the most devastating has been the 19th-century German historian Theodor Mommsen. For Mommsen, Cicero was a trimmer and a coward whose writings are negligible. "He was in fact so thorough a dabbler," wrote Mommsen, "that it was pretty much a matter of indifference to what work he applied his hand." He had, according to Mommsen, "no conviction and no passion." Just as in the pages of his *History of Rome* for Mommsen Julius Caesar can do no wrong, Marcus Tullius Cicero can do no right.

Volk's estimate of Cicero is more balanced. "Already during his lifetime," she writes, "he was considered Rome's greatest ora-

tor and famous for his verbal mastery. Cicero was a prolific writer, producing a vast corpus of speeches, poetry, philosophy, rhetorical works, and personal letters, moving at the forefront of his period's intellectual developments and crucially shaping the course of western literature and thought." Yet, as she also allows, "Cicero the eloquent writer and 'intellectual' cannot be separated from Cicero the doomed politician."

Some of Volk's best pages are on the unequal rivalry between Cicero and Caesar. Cicero, after much hesitation, joined Pompey against Caesar in the civil war that ended in Pompey's defeat at Pharsalus. Caesar, who wished to establish a reputation for clemency, forgave Cicero, yet there was little on which the two could not fail to disagree. Caesar dismissed Cicero as "a mere intellectual." Cicero later turned out to be among the greatest apologists for Caesar's assassination.

Even the subsidiary characters in the days of the late Roman Republic are interesting. One thinks of Atticus, Cicero's friend and correspondent, who, as Volk notes, saved Cicero's letters, but whose own letters to Cicero have disappeared. A fuller portrait appears in Gaston Boissier's splendid *Cicero and His Friends* (1897), in which one learns that Atticus was among the most prosperous of Roman landowners, though he had exiled himself to Athens. There he divested himself of all interest in an active political life, thus placing himself outside the dangerous arena that was Roman politics, a divesture perhaps made philosophically all the easier by his Epicureanism. Atticus is said to have been a brilliant conversationalist, whose learning, as Boissier puts it, was "too extensive… ever to become tedious." He rendered Cicero many services, both financial and literary. The affection that passed between the two men was deep, and never thwarted by betrayal on either side. In every way a remarkable man, Atticus nonetheless draws a slightly

condemnatory final word from Boissier for his self-protective withdrawal from public life: "[H]e was the most adroit of men of that time; but we know that there are other forms of praise that are more valuable than this."

Unlike Atticus, Cicero was lured lifelong by politics and came to believe that virtue received its best workout in the gymnasium of public life. In *De re publica*, he wrote: "For all men who have persevered, aided, and increased the fatherland there is a certain place reserved in heaven, where, blessed, they enjoy eternal life." After quoting this passage, Volk notes that for Cicero "it is politicians who go to heaven, not philosophers."

Cicero himself had served as consul of Rome in 63 B.C., the year he thwarted the Cataline conspiracy (an attempted coup by a disgruntled soldier who had lost the previous year's election). That Cicero did not come from a political or senatorial family makes his climb through the ranks, from quaestor to praetor to consul, all the more impressive. He was doubtless the greatest orator of his day and had everything needed for a grand political life, except judgment. He had come in on the side of Pompey, approved afterward the assassination of Caesar, and spoken out against Octavian and Antony, ending in his death. Yet few figures did more to shape Roman culture than Cicero.

Volk calls Cicero a Skeptic in his outlook, though she adds that his Skepticism "does not prevent Cicero from holding a view, or from selecting positive aspects of a variety of philosophies; it does, however, prevent him from accepting any doctrine sight unseen or merely because it comes as part of and parcel of a particular philosophical system." After citing the Roman contempt for Greek philosophy, she goes on to categorize her various cast of characters: Cato as a Stoic, Atticus and Cassius as Epicureans, etc. Julius

Caesar's philosophy, like much else about him, is unknown. "For all his significance," Volk confesses, "Caesar remains an enigma." But then, perhaps Caesar needed no philosophy, his ambition standing in for it just as his belief that he descended from the gods (from Venus, in particular) allowed him to do without religion, feeling himself a god.

What is new in Professor Volk's treatment of Roman philosophy is that she sees much of it as a form of group therapy. Philosophy, in this view, is most useful for consolation. "The basic thesis the consoler is trying to prove to the consoled is that the apparent present evil is not in fact an evil at all," she writes, "a line of approach based on the typical intellectualism of most ancient philosophy, according to which rational understanding will automatically lead to emotional adjustment." Cicero, who lost a beloved daughter and himself stood in need of much consolation, advised: "These, then, are the tasks of the consoler: to completely eradicate the distress, or to calm it, or to remove it as much as possible, or to suppress it and prevent it from developing further, or to redirect it to something else." At a minimum, philosophy was a helpful distraction in dark times. "In the late Republic," Volk writes, "philosophy thus crucially informed, not Roman politics as such, but Roman politicians."

The Roman Republic of Letters takes up the debate over proper Latin prose style during the period. The debate was chiefly between Cicero, who favored ornate or elevated style, and Julius Caesar, who favored plain or common usage. Neither may be said to have won, but the verbal mastery of each, in Volk's words, "would turn out to be most influential in shaping the Latin language for millennia to come." As for prose writing, legend had it that Caesar wrote his *Commentarii* by dictation while on horseback.

Almost as an afterthought, Volk touches on the careers of Marcus Terentius Varro and Publius Nigidius Figulus. Varro, a true polymath, was considered the most learned man in Rome. Cicero wrote to Varro, praising him for having "laid open the age of our fatherland; the division of time-reckoning; the laws of rites and priests; the practices of war and peace; and the names, types, purposes, and origins of dwellings, regions, and places, and of all divine and human matters. And you have thrown much light on our poets and on Latin language and literature in general." In later years Augustus appointed Varro to organize the first Roman library.

Varro was more the antiquarian than the historian, a distinction Volk borrows from Italian classicist Arnaldo Momigliano who explained: "(1) historians write in a chronological order; antiquaries write in a systematic order; (2) historians produce those facts which serve to illustrate or explain a certain situation; antiquaries collect all the items that are connected with a certain subject, whether they help to solve a problem or not."

This same distinction applies nicely to Katharina Volk's *The Roman Republic of Letters*, which is more an antiquarian, I should say, than a historical work. Through her great learning, Volk fills in little-known or hitherto undiscussed issues, questions, and problems in Roman history, though the book doesn't provide the satisfaction of a continuous story.

Finally, she briefly considers the career of Nigidius Figulus, a senator best known in his day as a reader of the signs and omens of the gods. The role of the gods in the ancient world is very much a mixed one. For many in the ancient world their importance was decisive; others allowed that the gods existed but believed they could not care less about the fate of human beings. Caesar apparently did not hold with omens.

As for Nigidius, according to Volk, "he comes across as a kind of 'Roman *Dr. Faustus*,' a seeker for arcane wisdom ready to apply his theoretical insights to the practical exigencies of his own life and times." Nigidius went in for divination, whether through extispicy (reading the entrails of sacrificial animals) or divining omens from thunder, eclipses, meteors, and other such phenomena, discovering portents everywhere. At a time when Roman senators often consulted astrologers, he was a man much in demand. He is supposed to have predicted to a fellow senator that the man's recently born son, a boy named Octavian, would one day be master of the world.

One might smile condescendingly at the Romans' ostensible naïveté for believing in such diviners, augurers, and false prophets. But then, don't we in the modern world employ such people ourselves—only we call them economists.

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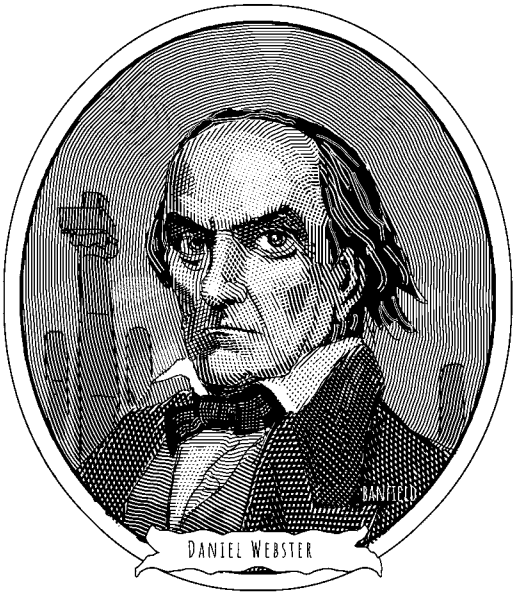

Book Review by Allen C. Guelzo

Black Dan

Indivisible: Daniel Webster and the Birth of American Nationalism, by Joel Richard Paul. Riverhead Books, 528 pages, $30

In the golden age of American political oratory, no one was closer to being the gold standard than Daniel Webster. When he died on October 24, 1852, *The New York Times* soberly predicted that "the name of Webster" would be "as much identified" with the American Republic "as that of Demosthenes with Greece,

and Cicero with Rome," and a Supreme Court Justice added, "I think the name of Webster is greater than either." And for once, the postmortem applause was not wrong. If "Godlike Daniel" (a nickname he earned in 1826 for a eulogy he delivered in Boston after the deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams) is remembered today for anything, it is for his oratory—for the Dartmouth College case ("It is, sir, as I have said, a small college,—and yet there are those who love it"), for the Second Reply to South Carolina Senator Robert Hayne ("Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable"), even for the Seventh of March speech, which broke a storm of obloquy over his head ("Mr. President, I wish to speak today, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American.… Hear me for my cause"). In time, Webster's eloquence became American rhetoric personified, as in these lines from a poem that ran in *Life* magazine in 1932:

Dan Webster stoked his boilers with
    brown jugs of apple cider,
And when he made a speech, he yanked
    the spigots open wider.
Sing ho, those spirited debates, bereft of
    all restrictions,
When statesmen carried on their hips
    the strength of their convictions.

For every Demosthenes, though, there is an Antipater; for every Cicero, an Augustus. Webster had no shortage of enemies, chief of which was, frankly, himself. "His infatuated admirers have styled him…as 'the Godlike,'" roared a furious William Lowndes Yancey on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1846, but to Yancey, "he bears another familiar appellation, and

I must think a true one—'*Black Dan*!'"

Webster moved across so many of the lines of American politics that he is hard to pin to any loyalty except himself. In 1814 he endorsed state nullification and the Hartford Convention, while in 1830 he denounced nullification, secession, and Robert Hayne together. In the 1830s, he emerged as one of the leaders of the Whig Party, but in 1841 betrayed them all to serve as John Tyler's secretary of state. In his first great headliner as an orator, he called upon Americans to "extirpate and destroy" the slave trade and attacked slavery (in the reply to Hayne) as "one of the greatest evils, both moral and political," yet in the Seventh of March speech in 1850 he shocked New England by vilifying abolitionists as those who "deal with morals as with mathematics," as though "what is right may be distinguished from what is wrong with the precision of an algebraic equation."

Truth be told, it was Webster who had replaced morals with mathematics. He was a womanizer, a dilettante, a calculator of the main chance, a chaser after the presidency for more than two decades. Dan Webster had discovered his great oratorical gifts too early, before he had learned to what purpose they should be subordinated, and that inversion made him less like a statesman and more like an actor, ladling out great drafts of soul-pricking cadences and sucking up adulation for profit and advantage.

But if Webster was an actor, let it also be said that he was a great actor, and probably the greatest actor that ever trod the American political stage.

The literature on Webster is vast, and shows no sign of slackening, even 17 decades after his last bow. It began in earnest with George Ticknor Curtis's adoring two-volume *Life of Daniel Webster* in 1872, and within only the last five

years has tallied major entries from Peter Hoffer (*Daniel Webster and the Unfinished Constitution*, 2021) and the prolific H.W. Brands (*Heirs of the Founders*, 2018). He has been characterized in this literature as everything from a conservative Whig to a New England sectionalist to the architect of American foreign relations. The argument that animates University of California Hastings Law School professor Joel Richard Paul's new entry, *Indivisible: Daniel Webster and the Birth of American Nationalism*, is that Webster is the father of American nationalism. Or at least of a good nationalism, since Paul is eager to showcase Webster's nationalism as an antidote to several other kinds of nationalism on offer. "It was not a foregone conclusion that the Union would form a nation," Paul writes at the opening of *Indivisible*, and Americans might easily have gone the route of forging a nationalism from what Paul regards as more toxic materials: *continental* nationalism, which built up "an abundant and prosperous empire" on land and ideas stolen from others; *populist* nationalism, which glorified an "American identity as exclusively white"; and *cultural* nationalism, which tried (and failed, according to Paul) to create a uniquely American literature.

What Webster represents for Paul is a *constitutional* nationalism "that does not discriminate between states or races and acts not as a compact among states but as an organic expression of the will of 'We the People.'" Paul believes that a "recent rise in white nationalism in America" now jeopardizes constitutional nationalism, and that its most virulent exponent is, well, You Know Who. "Closing our borders, turning away refugees, singling out people of different faiths, denying our multicultural heritage" are all departures from constitutional nationalism. Worse still, they are "emphatically un-American."

It is not entirely clear why Daniel Webster should have become the avatar of constitutional nationalism, unless one considers the Second Reply to Hayne as an example of it (although it is a mystery why Paul chose *Indivisible* as his title rather than *Inseparable*, since "indivisible" appears nowhere in the Reply to Hayne, or in any other of Webster's major speeches). In fact, when Webster invokes the Constitution in his rebuke to Hayne, it has an inadvertently populist ring to it: "It is, Sir, the people's Constitution, the people's government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people." Nor is it clear that a constitutional nationalism can be an "organic expression" of nationalism, since Romantic notions of organic identities are precisely what gave substance to the 20th century's lethal nationalisms of race and soil. The U.S. Constitution is a remarkably mechanical document, full of restraints and precise distributions of power, and intended to corral the over-mighty claims of the Union's states to follow their own paths. And when Abraham Lincoln borrowed Webster's "for the people" at Gettysburg in 1863, he linked it to a highly mechanical idea—a *proposition*, a *moral sentiment*—which suggested that American identity had nothing to do with nationalism at all. The American experiment, as Lincoln said in 1852, is devoted to "the advancement, prosperity and glory, of human liberty, human right and human nature."

This fundamental difficulty in dealing with Webster and nationalism is only exacerbated by how little attention Webster himself receives in *Indivisible*. This is much less a biography than a "life-and-times," with the lion's share devoted to the times. In a text of more than 400 pages, Webster literally disappears for puzzlingly long stretches. He is absent from chapters 7 through 9, chapter 12, chapters 15 and 16, chapters 22 through 24 and 29 through 31, not to mention large portions of other chapters—all told, from

one third of the book—while Paul devotes himself to a bird's-eye narrative of American politics during Webster's lifetime. It's not an unpleasant view, but it's also not what the reader of a biography of Daniel Webster would expect.

Nor does the territory the bird's eye takes in appear to be entirely familiar to Paul (despite having authored a biography of Chief Justice John Marshall, *Without Precedent*, in 2018). He seems to believe that the Confederate Constitution copies "the original federal Constitution almost word-for-word" (a quick look at the Confederate preamble will dispel that notion); that Bunker Hill "looms over downtown Boston" and was used by George Washington to bombard "the British fleet" (it may loom in a fashion over Charlestown, but Washington used Dorchester Heights to menace the British in Boston); that Andrew Jackson had "problems with his own sons" (Andrew and Rachel Jackson had no children); that James Knox Polk, rather than James Buchanan, was supposed to have had a "relationship" with Alabama senator William King; that Andrew Jackson's famous riposte to John Calhoun ("Our Union—it must be preserved") was an impulse because Jackson "felt he could no longer sit silent" rather than the carefully planned response that it was; that the "War Comet" of 1861 was unlike anything which had ever appeared "in living memory" (despite Donati's Comet of 1858, which scholars have called "one of the most spectacular astronomical events of the nineteenth century," and one which Lincoln watched from a porch in Illinois during his campaign against Stephen A. Douglas); that the original federal Fugitive Slave Law dates from 1789, rather than 1793; that Stephen A. Douglas "conveniently" owned "a large plantation in Louisiana" (the plantation was in Lawrence County, Mississippi, and came into his hands as a gift to his first wife from his father-in-law; Douglas sold the plantation in 1857 and bought another property south of Greeneville, but

still in Mississippi). Sorry, dear reader, to be tedious, but history, like music, is a precise art.

Paul is certainly correct, however, in at least one respect about Webster, which is that he is no model for conservative statesmanship, much less a competitor to Abraham Lincoln. In Webster's 1812 oration on the American Founding, he praised the study of history for its power to bind "the present to the past, and even to the future, in mutual attachments, sympathies and common desires." This would seem to pay a handsome and prudent tribute to a thoughtful reckoning with the past, in a spirit that conservatives should admire. That would be a mistake, too, because 40 years later, in the Seventh of March speech, what Webster meant by *history* was much more imbued with Romantic historicism than Enlightenment reason. Webster justified his endorsement of the Compromise of 1850 by speaking of history itself as an organic development, "a golden chain which is destined, I fully believe, to grapple the people of all the States in this Constitution, for ages to come." Webster could ignore slavery because freedom is achieved as a gradual evolution within history and toward which history gradually moves us, rather than a principle with which history must begin. Society, for Webster (as it was for the Romantics), is a product of the "concomitant rush of altered circumstances," and even liberty has "an ancestry, a pedigree, a history" from which it is evolving into something new and different in every generation.

It is significant that Webster's most appalled critics unanimously struck at him at just this point. Slavery was a violation of natural right and natural law, which existed as principles and rules intrinsic to human nature prior to the movements of history, and if those rights seemed to Webster to be mathematical abstractions, they seemed to William Seward "the only permanent foundations of

society." What history teaches us, argued Indiana Representative George W. Julian, is the constant need to reaffirm those natural rights, and when declension tempts Americans to stray from that path, our obligation is to "recur to first principles," not to drift toward a future that can be prettified as "the right side of history."

History has no sides. That this has been easily missed by modern conservatives arises, I suspect, from the dearth of conservative historical consciousness. The bulk of modern conservative intellectual energy has been devoted to politics, economic policy, and political philosophy; there has been no corresponding conservative historical theory, much less a natural law theory of history. But there should, and must, be one. We will need it, too, because all the major movements of the last century into tyranny and intellectual vacuity have been built on theories, not of economics or politics, but of history. Not Webster, not G.F.W. Hegel, not Leopold von Ranke or Jacob Burckhardt, but Lincoln, James Madison, Trenchard and Gordon, Samuel Johnson, and Emmerich de Vattel are the path we need to rediscover. Perhaps we shall soon enough do so.

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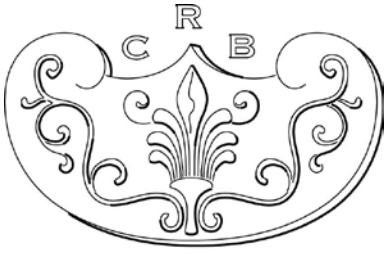

Book Review by David Azerrad

Locked Out

America's Philosopher: John Locke in American Intellectual Life, by Claire Rydell Arcenas. The University of Chicago Press, 280 pages, $35

John Locke's influence on the American Founding is so overwhelming and obvious that only an academic could deny it. Not only did Thomas Jefferson lift two turns of phrase from the *Second Treatise of Government* when drafting the Declaration of Independence—the "long train of abuses" and the fact that men are "more disposed to suffer"—but Locke's teaching on human equality, natural rights, government by consent, religious liberty, and the right to revolution constitute the bedrock of American republicanism, at both the national and state levels.

Among the colonists Locke was the most cited political writer between 1760 and 1775, the period when the revolution was effected in the minds of the people according to John Adams. The "great Mr. Locke," as some called him, was read and praised not just by Adams and Jefferson, but also by Benjamin Franklin, Sam-

uel Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and others. One of the signers of the Declaration, Benjamin Rush, called him "an oracle as to the principles…of government." Thus, a plaque near Locke's tomb at All Saints' Church in the small Essex village of High Laver fittingly reads: "[H]is philosophy guided the founders of the United States of America."

To acknowledge Locke's tremendous influence on the founding is not to insist *Locke et praeterea nihil* (Locke and nothing else), or to deny there were other influences. Nor is it to assert that the founders were thoroughly Lockean, i.e., that they agreed with every last line in the *Second Treatise* (they obviously didn't follow Locke's conflation of the executive and judiciary powers when designing the Constitution). Rather, it is to recognize, as Steven Dworetz demonstrated in his authoritative study of Locke's influence on the founding, *The Unvarnished Doctrine* (1990), that Lockean theory supplied "the concepts and categories in which the Revolutionaries articulated their deepest concerns about liberty and property."

Despite mountains of evidence, scholars have for decades been attempting to downplay Locke's influence. This should not be surprising. Given a sufficiently prominent topic in the humanities or the social sciences, academics will get around to arguing pretty much any position: Plato was a democrat, Nietzsche was a feminist, and the Civil War was about tariffs! The non-Lockean founding has been debunked repeatedly, most recently by my colleague Thomas West's comprehensive study, *The Political Theory of the American Founding* (2017), but the Locke wars continue to rage.

Claire Rydell Arcenas, who teaches history at the University of Montana, has now joined the fray on the side of those who seek to downplay Locke's influence on the founding. That she does so in a book entitled *America's Philosopher: John*

Locke in American Intellectual Life is all the more perplexing. She writes: "[I]t is entirely possible to write about Locke in the eighteenth century without mentioning the American founding documents or Thomas Jefferson in Philadelphia." It is indeed possible to do so, but why anyone would even want to consider doing so *in a book on Locke's influence on America* baffles the mind.

Arcenas does not so much argue against the Lockean founding as she just dismisses it. She devotes a mere three pages to Jefferson and the Declaration. By contrast, she devotes ten pages (in a book with only 169 pages of text) to the American critiques in the early 19th century of Locke's aristocratic *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, a work he was commissioned to write "as a lawyer writes a will" according to one scholar. An entire chapter of her book chronicles Locke's declining influence in the academy after the Civil War.

But when it comes to the document which gave birth to the United States of America as a sovereign nation and articulated its fundamental political principles, the Declaration cannot be Lockean, asserts Arcenas, because it speaks of the pursuit of happiness, whereas Locke generally speaks of property in his *Second Treatise*. The two are, of course, deeply intertwined in Locke, as man's earthly pursuit of happiness both requires property (in particular, what he calls "the conveniences of life") and will result in the acquisition of property. As Pennsylvania representative John Dickinson concisely explained at the time of the founding:

> I have a right to be happy. If there can be no happiness without freedom, I have a right to be free. If I cannot enjoy freedom without security of property, I have a right to be thus secured.

Arcenas also maintains, contrary to all evidence in our founding documents, that America is anchored in the idea of an "original

contract" between the rulers and ruled, rather than the Lockean social contract among individuals to form a political community. She thus unwittingly adopts Franklin Roosevelt's reinterpretation of the social contract.

Arcenas is, however, insistent that Locke the philosopher, theologian, and theorist was widely read and respected in early America. While reading the *Second Treatise* out of the founding, she magnifies the importance of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Even then, although Arcenas offers evidence that Locke was read, she does not establish to what extent his ideas, in particular his most unconventional ideas, took root in early America. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, for example, which she emphasizes was his "best-known work," Locke argues that things "are good or evil, only in reference to pleasure or pain." Arcenas makes no mention of his hedonistic moral philosophy and we are left wondering what the American colonists made of such claims. Nor does she notice Locke's repeated invocations of the "pursuit of happiness" in the *Essay*.

The remainder of the book describes how Locke's influence waned during the Progressive era before waxing in the post-World War II era when Americans, in her telling, first discovered Locke the liberal political theorist and engaged him in the global fight against Communism. As Arcenas observes, Karl Marx is the third-most cited author, after Locke and Jefferson, in Louis Hartz's celebration of America's Lockean spirit, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). Her last chapter focuses on Robert Nozick's "Lockean libertarianism" and Willmore Kendall's idiosyncratic reading of Locke and Kendall's own efforts to downplay his importance to the founders.

The net effect of *America's Philosopher* is to minimize both Locke's philosophical brilliance and his influence on the founding and subsequent American history. His decisive contribution to American republicanism is not just obscured but denied. We are left with a series of vignettes about various Americans of secondary importance who read Locke and either agreed or disagreed with him, but we are never told who got him right.

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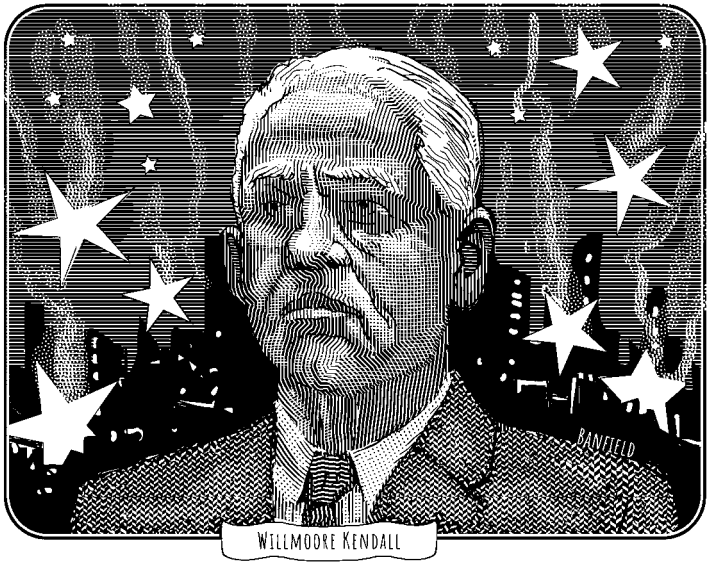

Book Review by Stephen Wu

He Could Spellbind and Slay

Heaven Can Indeed Fall: The Life of Willmoore Kendall, by Christopher H. Owen. Rowman & Littlefield, 256 pages, $105

Abe Ravelstein was the most famous philosopher to come forth from novelist Saul Bellow's pen—but he wasn't the first. Decades before using the University of Chicago's Allan Bloom as the model for the Plato-quoting title character in *Ravelstein* (2000), Bellow dreamed up a hard-drinking ex-OSS operative and firebrand political theorist named William Mosby for

the 1968 short story "Mosby's Memoirs." Mosby "thought much, accomplished much," and "made some of the most interesting mistakes a man could make in the twentieth century." He surveyed the field of political philosophy and found it wanting:

> As one who had personally tried to create a more rigorous environment for slovenly intellectuals, to force them to do their homework, to harden the categories of political thought, he was aware that on the Right as on the Left the results were barren…. Princeton University had offered Mosby a lump sum to retire seven years early. One hundred and forty thousand dollars. Because his mode of discourse was so upsetting to the academic community. Mosby was invited to no television programs. He was like the Guerrilla Mosby of the Civil War. When he galloped in, all were slaughtered.

Willmoore Kendall—the inspiration for Mosby—could spellbind and slay. The son of a blind Methodist preacher from Oklahoma, Kendall became a slashing Cold Warrior armed with heartland sensibilities. He was a founding editor for *National Review*, started by his undergraduate student William F. Buckley; authored important studies on John Locke and the American political tradition from perches at Yale, Stanford, and the University of Dallas; oversaw anti-Communist propaganda in Latin America; and generally incensed friends and foes alike. Yet for all his many contributions, both polemical and academic, Kendall has largely been forgotten.

Partly this is due to an early death from a heart attack in 1967, at age 58. Perhaps too his personal prickliness made it hard to win over hearts, even if minds acquiesced. Kendall left behind no "school" of disciples despite constructing a distinct political theo-

ry. In its simplest form it was a right-wing populism, but one constrained by shared political commitments. Kendall's populism was rooted in his distrust of elites—be they the media, the judiciary, or the "expert" class—and in placing the locus of legitimacy in majority rule. And his conservatism found expression in a powerful defense of the historic political and cultural consensus embodied in America's founding documents and his clarion calls against the dangerous consequences of untrammeled philosophical liberalism.

If those concerns sound prescient, it is because contemporary society may have borne out Kendall's worries and his warnings. So Christopher Owen's *Heaven Can Indeed Fall: The Life of Willmoore Kendall* feels timely. An emeritus professor of history at Northeastern State University, Owen traces Kendall's development from a self-described "good socialist" into a seminal figure of postwar conservatism. His is the first book-length treatment of Kendall; it is not a comprehensive intellectual biography but rather a well-sourced chronological overview of his life and works.

Owen introduces readers to a precocious wunderkind born in 1909 to a staunchly Midwest Democratic family. Under the tutelage of his father, the Reverend Willmoore Kendall, Sr., young Willmoore started high school at age 9 and arrived at Northwestern University by 13, only to flunk out within a semester. He got his first taste of journalism working as a junior reporter at the *Tulsa Tribune* for two years, and then finished college at the University of Oklahoma. Adept at Spanish—his father having mastered Greek, Hebrew, French, and German—Willmoore returned to Evanston to take a graduate degree in Romance languages. In 1930 he enrolled at the University of Illinois for a Ph.D. in the same, but two years in won a Rhodes scholarship to study philosophy, politics, and economics at Pembroke College, Oxford.

There his college tutor was R.G. Collingwood, the celebrated philosopher and historian whose influence, Kendall later remarked, would "weigh very heavily" upon him throughout his life. Though he did not adopt wholesale Collingwood's "reenactment" theory of historical imagination, Kendall did take to heart the exhortation to seek out an author's own understanding of his work rather than filter it through imposed critical lenses. This approach suited Kendall and was shared and refined by the New Critics at Louisiana State University, where he would later take up a teaching post.

At Oxford Kendall indulged in youthful socialist fervor as he imbibed from Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes, writing to his father of "enslaving conventions" and complaining of the strictures on the working class. Kendall's collectivism would abate, but his concern for the everyman remained a constant of his political theory. Take for instance one of his earliest academic writings, "The Majority Principle and the Scientific Elite" (*The Southern Review*, 1938), published while teaching at LSU and still completing Ph.D. studies. There Kendall outlined the fundamental inescapability of the majority principle: either we live in a regime whose decisions are made by 50% plus one, or we do not. The young Kendall equated pro-majoritarianism with the "true Left," i.e., the champions of "the people," and anti-majoritarianism with the "true Right," i.e., the group seeking to concentrate decision-making among elites. Kendall then applied those categories to the American system, influenced by fashionable arguments that the founders had set up a conservative cabal to thwart the popular will with separated powers, judicial review, and limitations on government. Kendall would later reverse that view as he developed a more nuanced political theory, but even as a graduate student he had already identified his abiding themes: that the majority principle is inescapable, that ethics must precede politics, and that any *real* majority debate cannot

be confined to a limited class of scientists, bureaucrats, jurists, or tastemakers.

After taking his Oxford degree, marrying (for the first time of three), and briefly working as a journalist at the United Press in Madrid, Kendall returned to Illinois to complete his doctorate, switching from Romance languages to political science. His dissertation offered a revisionist account of John Locke by recasting him not as the quintessential advocate of individual natural rights, but rather a proponent of majority rule. Through a close reading of the *Second Treatise* he argued that Locke, despite his purported defense of natural rights, did not actually hold them sacrosanct above all else. Kendall maintained that the social contract, even on Locke's own terms, vested rights in civil society only as approved and conferred by the majority. This led to what Kendall described as a tension in Locke's political theory: How could natural rights be immutable and intrinsic, but also never guaranteed except by majority grace? Early Kendall reconciled the two by reading into Locke a "latent premise" that allowed majoritarianism and rights theory to coexist: a rational majority would never withdraw natural rights from the minority or from the sphere of politics.

Kendall's position borrowed heavily from Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The "rational majority" resembled Rousseau's "general will," which itself would channel the civic virtue inherent in small, homogeneous communities toward the common good. A constrained politics was both natural and necessary to Rousseau, since liberty would founder if devolved away from direct democracy into representative institutions (as any large or heterogeneous polity required). That analytic framework is evident throughout Kendall's early works; his model for good governance was the plebiscitary de-

mocracy of Athens' like-minded countrymen. Thus in "The People Versus Socrates Revisited" (*Modern Age*, 1958), Kendall praised the Athenian jury for its majoritarian decision to eliminate a man whose alleged denial of the city's gods threatened to corrupt her youth and destabilize her society. When it came to the People versus Socrates, Kendall was with the people.

This pragmatic commitment to preserving a society's way of life recurs in Kendall's thought. It helps to explain his vociferous anti-Communism and early defense of Senator Joe McCarthy in the 1950s. By then he had spent time working in government, overseeing propaganda in Latin America during World War II in Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Drawing on his journalism background, Kendall would write twice-daily radio scripts in Spanish and Portuguese to counter the Axis information campaign. In these he began to solidify for himself a robust nationalism. After the war, as his personal conservative reformation continued, he would go on to work for the Central Intelligence Group, a precursor to the CIA.

On the strength of his government recommendations and his academic writings he landed a spot in Yale's Political Science department. So when Bill Buckley and Brent Bozell showed up as undergraduates spoiling to fight the university's left-wing consensus, they found a ready ally in the professor. He would continue to advise the pair in their writings, and offer his own as a regular contributor to *National Review*. That mentorship, combined with continued support for McCarthy, would fully and finally ostracize Kendall from the Yale faculty and eventually lead to their buying out his tenure. But Kendall believed that the overwhelming majority of citizens (faculty clubs notwithstanding) condemned clear anti-American sympathizers. He could therefore marry his major-

itarian sympathies with his patriotic ones.

It was hardly reflexive jingoism at the root of Kendall's behavior. Communism was the latest and then-most serious threat to the fundamental character of the polity itself, but Kendall would have objected on philosophical grounds to any and all such assaults on the basic American way of life. He had no time for unlimited liberal toleration that countenanced outright anti-Americanism in the public square. He excoriated John Stuart Mill as the poster boy of a destructive and internally inconsistent liberalism that declared all questions open except for the question of toleration itself. It was inconsistent because it was illiberal about its first principles, and dangerous because it conceived of society as nothing more than a "debating club," abstracted away from actual communities, tradition, and lived experience. Kendall's critical insight was that a society predicated on such bottomless inquiry—an "all-questions-are-open-questions" society—must eventually fall into such profound differences of opinion that the "common premises" of deliberative decision-making and shared living disappear completely. At that point, the extremes of opinion will polarize and ossify, suspicion will fester, and toleration between rival camps—the very goal of the original project—will become impossible. In other words, total open-mindedness yields total collapse.

Kendall's political theory therefore required some shared connective tissue that would allow for communal decision-making—what he would later call a "constitutional morality." The phrase fused together underlying commitments to traditional morality and classical virtue alongside newfound appreciation for the structural features of the U.S. Constitution. Gone was his youthful disdain for the founders as self-interested hoarders of power. In its place was a nuanced reading of *The Fed-*

eralist wherein enumerated and separated powers, combined with judicious safeguards such as the local selection of congressmen, cooperated together to channel majority will and suppress majority faction. Kendall maintained his longstanding position that majority rule was the legitimate mode of governance, but he now understood the Madisonian project as an ingenious design to filter majority sentiment while evading the danger of mob rule. Congress would bring virtuous statesmen to office to reflect local constituencies and concerns while nevertheless acting for the whole. The president was to counterbalance by embodying a national majority consensus. But the lodestar, in Kendall's view, was always deliberative democracy concerned with the common good, which he took as the hallmark of the American tradition all the way back to the Mayflower Compact. Kendall therefore inaugurated an understanding of the founding that shifted emphasis away from inalienable rights and toward a consensus-based politics that he claimed had been built into the fabric of American constitutionalism since 1620.

At this final turn in his intellectual development, Kendall accordingly discarded the conventional wisdom that the founding constituted a philosophical revolution powered by Locke. Drawing from the teachings of Leo Strauss, Kendall came to realize that the "latent premise" he had earlier ascribed to the *Second Treatise*—a benevolent majority allowing absolute majority rule to coexist with natural rights—was really his own invention. The mature Kendall recognized that Locke's seeming contradiction was deliberately designed to conceal his true, esoteric teaching, which prized the ultimate right of self-preservation without any corresponding duties. In Lockean philosophy, this right cannot even be renounced or made forfeit via the social contract. At bottom, that absolutist emphasis on rights destroyed the prospect for deliberative decision-making and reduced Locke's politics, in the last analysis, to

consent. In Kendall's view, the necessary and unacceptable consequence of that framework was individualism unbound.

Thus Kendall's most developed work occupies a space between two camps of modern American conservatism. The first, mapping onto what might be provisionally called "national conservatism," argues that America, built fundamentally on a Lockean foundation, was therefore doomed from the beginning to degenerate into atomized self-interest. On the other hand, classical liberals and some subset of Claremont scholars (including the late Harry V. Jaffa) agreed that Locke did serve in some form or another as the country's philosophical progenitor, but countered that Lockean political equality and individual freedom allowed America to prosper and indeed flourish. Kendall took the third way: he denied Locke parentage over the American Founding but reasoned that America was better for it. Put another way, he agreed with the national conservatives on the perniciousness of Locke but with the Jaffa-ites on the goodness of America.

So where, ultimately, might we situate Kendall? Owen gives us the portrait of a conservative and a populist who scrambled the standard Left-Right divides. He embraced the everyman and not the power brokers. He was a perennial champion of majority rule. But his ideal majority was drawn from a community that, if not homogeneous, at least shared and embraced a common cultural and historical vocabulary. It had to be one committed first to a notion of civic "Americanism" that would then permit broader political debate and discussion within those bounded parameters. Anything less would lead to a fractured society unable to sustain republican governance and—eventually—even basic political discourse. Existential threats from within and without always required vigilance in defense of an America that Kendall regarded as fundamentally

good and fundamentally worth conserving. As he warned his students of the utopian schemers, "These are people who are going to do justice, let heaven fall where it may. And I say to them, heaven indeed can fall and that it can hurt some of the heads it hits mighty bad."

The question facing American conservatives today is whether the constitutional morality Kendall laid out as a precondition of the republic's survival is still possible. But as the Right contemplates re-assimilating bluer collars into its electorate, as it pushes back against unlimited pluralism, and as it tries to recover an authentic notion of its tradition, the man who left no school may yet find new students.

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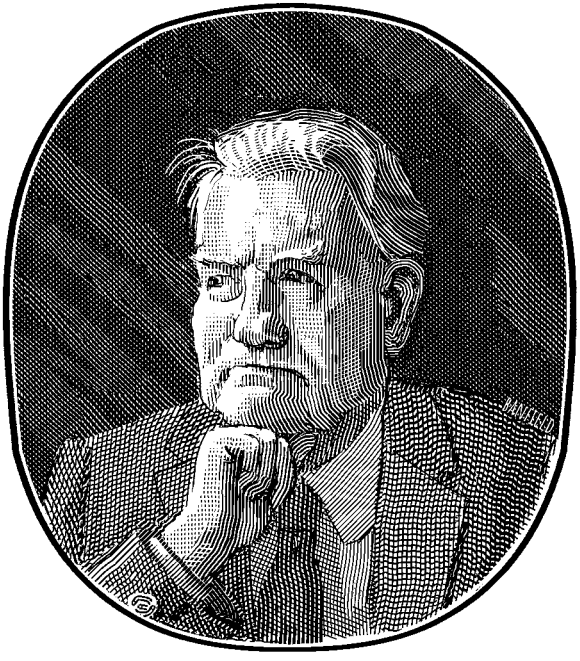


Essay by Conrad Black

A Magnificent Phenomenon

Remembering Paul Johnson.

As a friend of Paul Johnson's for more than 35 years, my first recollections of him on the news of his death on January 12, at age 94, were of his kindness and wise advice to me when I arrived in London as a newspaper owner in the mid-1980s. And these recollections are only fortified by his countless acts of

generous solidarity in subsequent decades. Particularly, I recalled his implacable support of me when I was under heavy attack in the British media when, as has now been determined, I was falsely accused by American prosecutors of defrauding my shareholders. We had many differences of opinion, as Paul was a man of an extraordinary range of interests and a decisive nature that formulated opinions quickly. And he had great talent as a forensic advocate, which impelled him to express his opinions constantly, without reserve, and frequently in extremely colorful, entertaining, and often perceptive terms. He also had that technique which I've only also seen in the upper socioeconomic echelons of New York and official Washington, of denouncing in violent strictures people with whom he was perfectly cordial face to face.

Getting On Well

I recall one occasion when he had been bombarding me for several months personally and in emails and faxes about the utter ineptitude of one of my editors. My stupefaction was considerable when I arrived at one of Paul and Marigold's (his wife of 65 years) many well-attended outdoor drinks parties—made all the more interesting for the remarkable range of their cordial acquaintances—to see the editor he had been raging at me for months to dismiss introduced about as if he were the most eminent of all of the many celebrities present.

Even with those of whom he approved, Paul still liberally exercised his right to give advice peremptorily and incontestably. I think I was comfortably and gratefully in this category, sharing it with a number of distinguished people such as Rupert Murdoch and Tony Blair. Above us was a pantheon of those so exalted in Paul's esteem that any criticism of them was apt to bring an incendiary rebuke.

The chief occupant of this stratum in my experience was Margaret Thatcher and as I venerated her almost as much as Paul did, this was never an issue between us. (For several months after she was shamefully ousted by her own treacherous and ungrateful party in 1990, Paul would greet her with the mistaken but entirely well-intentioned assurance: "You'll be back in three weeks!" If only; Britain is now almost back to pre-Thatcher irresolution and demoralization.)

To be a friend of Paul's was to be treated to the refreshing roller coaster ride of his personality. But if there were ever a genuine crisis, few people I have known were as reliably and formidably responsive as Paul Johnson. He defended his friends in print and conversationally with extreme vigor. He was a friend of Jonathan Aitken, a grandnephew of Lord Beaverbrook, a Thatcher-era M.P., and a kindred spirit in the alternate political and social establishment conducted for some years in London by flamboyant financier and politician Sir James Goldsmith, casino-owner and zoologist John Aspinall, and a number of other more or less eccentric scions of well-known families. When Aitken's libel suit against *The Guardian* collapsed and it became evident that he had perjured himself, Paul conducted in *The Spectator*, which my associates and I then owned, a vendetta against *The Guardian* and its editor and a defense of Aitken that were so vehement and ingenious that the *Guardian* editor was effectively stripped of his self-righteousness and reduced to writing to me asking that I restrain Paul. Since Johnson and Aitken were both friends and I have long regarded *The Guardian* as the most nauseating newspaper in the English language, it gave me the utmost pleasure, politely to decline his request.

Socially, Paul was like an adjustable radar apparatus that could adapt to any interlocutor. He was from a modest socioeconomic up-country background, was educated by the Jesuits at the famous Stonyhurst College, and was a scholarship student at Oxford

where his supervisor in history was the eminent controversialist historian, Alan J.P. Taylor, whom Paul emulated in a number of his works, consciously or otherwise, in his startling historical reinterpretations. This combination of a thoroughly respectable but not wealthy background, high-quality education amongst unusually intelligent students often of well-to-do families, and his national service in days when Britain drafted its young men (he served at Gibraltar shortly after World War II) all made Paul at once reasonably respectful and not at all chippy toward important people, but admirably courteous and, when appropriate, solicitous of ordinary people, including all young people and all those in subordinate positions. On countless occasions, I witnessed Paul inquiring pleasantly and with genuine interest of even very young people and their still young minders, legitimately curious without being nosy or annoying about where they came from and what they liked to do. He was one of those unusual people who if he made the slightest effort, as he almost always did, could get on well with anyone of any identifiable cultural, sociological, or sectarian group, and could discuss almost any subject knowledgeably, so wide were his own interests. Once when he was at my home in London, he saw my large model of *H.M.S. Hood*, that had been used in the film *Sink the Bismarck!* (1960). He immediately gave a very recondite analysis of the exchange of fire between the two famous warships.

Always Lively

He naturally started out as a man of the Left, and equally naturally, given the spectacular failure of left-wing government in Britain in the '70s, he became a conservative and a powerful tribune of Thatcherism. He did not share his friend, our *Sunday Telegraph* editor, Peregrine Worsthorne's snooty condescen-

sion toward "bourgeois triumphalism"; Paul respected everyone. Although he tended to despise the masses and popular tastes, he was never a snob. He had no prejudices against any group, and formed his opinions based on the intelligence and personality of everyone he met. It is unusual to find so prodigious an intellect without any sense of intellectual self-importance. He was respectful of the many exalted people he met; when he came to a dinner Barbara and I held for Henry Kissinger, he brought a sketch he had done of him, himself. He was an ardent and talented sketcher and painter, in watercolors and oil. Other obituarists have written concerning the evolution in his political views, that Paul, to borrow William Blake's phrase, changed his opinions but not his principles. That is probably true.

But he also seems to have had a full-body immersion in the faddish and somewhat anarchic left radicalism of the '60s. He was at this point the leftist *New Statesman* correspondent in Paris, in which capacity his finest hour was to commit the almost unprecedented impudence of interrupting General de Gaulle at one of his carefully prepared press conferences. When de Gaulle proclaimed his support of a Europe of fatherlands ("Europe des patries"), he said that he wanted to build the Europe of Dante, Goethe, and Châteaubriand. The young English representative of the *New Statesman*, under a mighty profusion of unkempt red hair spoke up: "Et de Shakespeare, mon general"—more an assertion than a question. As Paul recalled, the majestic founder of the Free French and of the Fifth Republic, little accustomed to being interrupted, or to being addressed in such comradely terms by the disheveled representative of a leftist British intellectual magazine, said with an epic Gallic shrug, "Oui, aurons Shakespeare" ("Yes, we will have Shakespeare"). Even the most opinionated journalists on the French Left never presumed to interrupt de Gaulle, and Paul was lionized by the Paris press corps.

But four years later, in 1968, when a student strike broadened to

a general strike and it appeared to anti-Gaullists that Gaullism was crumbling, Paul briefly fell in with that sentiment. But de Gaulle responded decisively, and after ostentatiously assuring himself of the loyalty of the army, called an election, and achieved the greatest electoral victory in 175 years of Republican French history. In retrospect, Paul told me that he had put "too much of a premium on the superficially refreshing libertarianism of the students and the workers and had momentarily forgotten de Gaulle's extraordinary ability to personify France in moments of crisis."

Paul's journalism in the years that I knew him was always lively but largely confined to cultural areas. He was conversant with almost all the works of all the well-known Western authors, was a knowledgeable art historian, and had very well informed though traditional tastes. He and Marigold, who had once been a Labour Party candidate and was somewhat to his left, agreed at some point that they would not discuss politics; which left them with many other subjects to discuss, including their four talented children. Paul famously regarded Picasso as a fraud and almost all modern art as rubbish. William F. Buckley, Jr., wrote, almost surely accurately, that Paul had "as productive a literary-analytical career as any in modern times," and he wrote a flattering introduction to *The Quotable Paul Johnson: A Topical Guide to his Wit, Wisdom, and Satire* (1994), which contains 2,000 aphorisms and epigrams on every conceivable subject.

Chosen Peoples

To those who did not know him, Paul will be best remembered as a historian, where he must be considered the indomitable head of a highly interpretive and aggressively controversial historical school. Assessing him as a historian is a

complicated task. Regarding the body of his work and having read most of it, I think Paul was preeminently a national British historian. He revered the Jews as progenitors of Christianity and as an imperishable, brilliantly creative, and courageous people. Both as a historian and as a devoted if somewhat eccentric Roman Catholic, Paul embraced the concept of the chosen people. He generally took Communion in his local Roman Catholic Church every day but thoroughly approved of the Reformation and held his Church responsible for inheriting the mantle of the Roman Empire in imposing order at the expense of progress and discovery, and for retarding Western man for a thousand years from the fall of Rome to the Reformation. He used to lecture me as a co-religionist on the evils of going to churches in London where he said the clergy was "infested with sodomites." He dismissed my suggestions that the early Christian Church deserves great credit for preserving antiquities, humanizing politics and assimilating the barbarians, and funding and eventually encouraging the principal figures of the Renaissance, most conspicuously, Michelangelo and Raphael.

Before I ever met Paul and was just starting to read his books, I noted in the introduction to his *The Offshore Islanders: A History of the English People* (1972; later reissued as *A History of the English People*) that "[m]uch research tends to obscure, rather than reveal, the truth; or, most depressing of all, to suggest that truth cannot be finally established, often on matters of outstanding importance." From this premise Paul chose with certain important formulations to dispense with research altogether with hazardous but often very interesting and even humorous consequences. He strenuously believed that the Jews genuinely were, and had the psychology of, a chosen people, and that the key to the modern world was the "gradually emerging recognition by the English that they, in their island, and especially after they had severed their connections with

Rome, were the new chosen people." He's the author and, as far as I know, the sole adherent of the theory that the murder of Thomas à Becket in the 11th century "gave birth to English anti-clericalism, a smoldering national force which was to grow in depth and volume until it found expression in the Reformation." He likened Becket to Sir Thomas More.

He believed that William II and Henry I, followed by Henry V, Elizabeth I, and Oliver Cromwell were great national leaders who developed and personified the theory of Britain as a chosen people:

> What sustained the English during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation years, what enabled them to preserve heterodoxy in England and uphold it on the continent, what enabled them to defeat the Armada and rip open the world empire of Spain—in short to thrust aside the inert log of the Roman heritage and allow the stream of progress to flow again—was not just patriotism, or nationalism, but racism, the most powerful of all human impulses. The English came to believe that they were the chosen people…. They could thus answer the Continental armory of faith and superstition with the vehement conviction of divinely inspired direction—the English reached the audacious conclusion that God, having found the Jews inadequate for His great purposes, had entrusted the island race with the unique role of completing his kingdom on earth. Their island situation had made them natural racists, overbearing and aggressive towards strangers, holding their own superiority to the rest of mankind to be self-evident.

This is an interesting argument, and there is no doubt that the British developed a unique notion of their national vocation. But the

embellishment of a religious notion of a chosen people in succession to Israel, because of Israel's inadequacies (which, if pushed, Paul conceded to be the failure to recognize the Messiah), is a hard sell.

Because Paul was such an amiable though curmudgeonly figure, he got a free pass for a number of historical theories which are the core of his beliefs but were extremely difficult to sustain. The idea that the murder of Becket had any connection to the apostasy of Henry VIII 450 years later is nonsense. He argued that "happily the genius of the English for rewriting history while it is still happening turned an acrimonious disaster into a triumph of constitutional good sense and moderation." He held that the Magna Carta was only transformed by "a process of constructive national myopia and confusion (into) the bedrock of the English Constitution," and this only occurred when the early death of Pope Innocent III and King John "cleared the way for creative fiction and it became a solemn concordat." He claimed that this process was replicated when "Canute was transformed from a Scandinavian ruffian into an English Christian gentlemen, as the disaster at Dunkirk was transmuted into the prelude to victory," as Paul claimed it was represented. (Winston Churchill warned in a broadcast that Dunkirk was not a victory and that "wars are not won by evacuations." If Paul thought it was a disaster, one wonders how he would have described the German capture or destruction of the entire 338,000 Anglo-French force.)

Paul even noted that William II and Henry I were criticized by monks because they had red hair and said that Robert Peel, Stanley Baldwin, and Churchill were persecuted by their parties for the same reason. It is a bizarre theory and does not require a talented psychotherapist to imagine that Paul, who into his early 90s had a terrific shock of red hair, believed that he suffered similar discrimination.

> If Henry V had lived a few months longer he would have become king of France and European tyrant, had he survived middle-age.... Elizabeth was Deborah, a virtuous and virginal creature, the special spiritual servant of God divinely appointed to safeguard true religion and lead the English to victory over God's enemies.

(Deborah was a proverbial figure of inspiration in ancient Jewish lore and Paul was debunking the Church whose sacraments he took practically every day of his adult life. This, too, is interesting, but it is simplistic and, to say the least, unrigorous.) In the same effusive manner, he held that the meeting of the officers of Cromwell's New Model Army at St. Mary's Church in Putney in 1647

> proceeded to invent modern politics—in fact, the public framework of the world in which nearly 3 billion people now live.... The ideas flung across that communion table and all the exciting novelty of their pristine conception traveled around the world, hurled down thrones and subverted empires, and became the common everyday currency of political exchange. Every major political concept known to us today, all the assumptions which underlie the thoughts of men in the White House, or the Kremlin, or Downing Street, or in presidential mansions or senates or parliaments through five continents were expressed or adumbrated in the little church of St. Mary, Putney.

His enthusiasm for his novel application of the concept of the chosen people transported him to some formidable exaggerations; the historic road from Putney to the Kremlin is very tortuous, and hitherto unsuspected.

Loved or Loathed

It must be said that as a historian, and to some extent as a man, Paul loved or he loathed. He loved the builders of what he regarded as the exceptional British character. "Cromwell's rebellion and the execution of Charles I were a reassertion of national pride, self-respect, and patriotism." Murdering the king, instead of just reducing his powers or even banishing him, was a needless, horrible, and ultimately futile crime. And in his hatred of the Stuart dynasty, Paul omitted to mention that they were brought back to Britain and restored on the throne, after Cromwell died, as a result of refusing to take quinine as the only known cure for malaria because it had been discovered by Jesuit priests, and that Cromwell was himself exhumed and posthumously decapitated, his head placed on a pike to widespread public approbation, where it remained on public display for 24 years. Even he would have found it a challenge to square that with "national pride, self-respect, and patriotism."

A great many examples of this sort of eccentric conclusion by Paul could be cited. But it doesn't dilute the point that Paul Johnson was above all a believer in order, with a reasonable amount of freedom, and in the dignity and fundamental equality of all people, although he did certainly believe that the English-speaking Judeo-Christian peoples were psychologically, historically, and societally superior. His enthusiasm for the newer English-speaking countries was undoubtedly enhanced because "the arrogance of the English is gone and with it their self-confidence. The world suddenly seems a vast and alien place." England had not needed "nation states as allies, because her true allies were the forces of enlightenment, moral, economic, and constitutional." Paul never explained how he thought Britain lost the magic touch, any more

than he explained how Israel fumbled the torch of the chosen, across a millennium, to the English. The custodians of all this are now the British offspring and particularly the Americans. This is the source of his great affection for the United States and for the Dominions of the old Commonwealth: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. He had many friends in all of those countries and believed that they were founded and built by the very best people from the old country and from Europe. He encouraged me for years to write a history of Canada and when I did so in *Rise to Greatness: The History of Canada from the Vikings to the Present* (2014) and dedicated it to him and a number of other people who took an interest in that project, he wrote a very gracious foreword for it.

In his more general surveys, such as *The Birth of the Modern: World Society, 1815–1830* (1991) and *Modern Times: A History of the World from the 1920s to the 1980s* (1983), there are outstanding cavalcades of people and events that reveal Paul's great talents as a historical raconteur and narrator, and these are generally reckoned as his greatest books, because they are not much colored by his championship of his own relatively benign theories of racism—he didn't disparage others, he just thought the Anglo-Saxons had achieved something that in sports would be called the pride of champions.

This brings us to his *A History of the American People* (1997), which is a substantial contribution to that vast literature. The readers are the beneficiary of Paul's extraordinary ability to insert amusing quotations; thus, according to Thomas Carlyle, George Ripley, the founder of the utopian Brook Farm community, was "[a] Socinian minister who left the pulpit to return to reform the world by growing onions." And when accused of joining in febrile negotiations to resolve the impasse of the 1824 election, the ap-

parent winner, one of Paul's favorites, General Andrew Jackson, replied that "Mrs. Jackson and myself remain at home smoking our pipes"—clay pipes for his wife but a long stemmed Powhatan bowl pipe for the future president, who puffed until the room "was so obfuscated that one could hardly breathe."

Most of this book on the Americans is excellent, well-organized, and, as always with Paul, exceptionally finely written. And as usual, he tends to like the underdogs, not the champions. He purports to believe that Henry Clay, one of America's greatest legislators and three-time candidate for president, could have avoided the Civil War. But his genius was as a compromiser and matters eventually reached the point where compromise was impossible—as Abraham Lincoln, whom Paul rightly confirms as the greatest of all Americans, demonstrated. (One side "would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came," as Lincoln put it in his Second Inaugural Address. Clay shot his last bolt with the Compromise of 1850, which delayed the conflict for ten years.)

Paul rightly recognizes Richard Nixon as an outstanding president who was the victim of "American juvenilia." No one really disputes that President Harry Truman couldn't tolerate General Douglas MacArthur's insubordination, but Paul ducks the fact that, in strategic terms, the general was probably correct and if he had been listened to, we wouldn't be plagued by the North Koreans now. Like many foreign observers of the United States, he is carried away by his suspicions: he overstates the relationship between the Kennedys and the Chicago mafia and there is no evidence that Franklin Roosevelt suppressed a criminal tax fraud indictment of then-Congressman Lyndon Johnson. The gossip-historian Kitty Kelley is cited in one anti-Kennedy reference, but the footnote advises that she should be treated with caution; she is so scurrilous

that Ms. Kelley should never be cited by any serious historian. Paul despised the Kennedys, as he is dismissive of Nelson Mandela as a poor president of South Africa when he finally attained the position in 1994.

The one horrifying shortcoming of this book is Paul's violent, relentless assault on FDR, who is portrayed as almost completely dishonest and a profligate fiscal spender, though courageous in fighting polio and an undoubted public relations talent. But he is reviled for failing to vanquish the Depression and accused of doing nothing significant to support the democracies against Hitler or "to involve the United States in the conflict…. Roosevelt showed himself as lacking in leadership as Baldwin and Chamberlain or Daladier."

In fact, Roosevelt practically eliminated unemployment a year before the U.S. entered the war. He not only denounced Hitler before Churchill did, he gave the British 50 destroyers and imposed peacetime conscription for the first time in American history in the midst of a close election when, to deal with the war crisis, he broke a tradition as old as the republic by seeking a third term in 1940. He extended American territorial waters from three miles to 1,800 nautical miles and ordered the U.S. Navy to attack on detection any German or Italian vessel, and he enabled Britain and Canada to continue in the war by allowing them to buy anything they needed to conduct the war and pay for it when they were able to do so. Roosevelt attempted to provoke Hitler into attacking the United States by depth-charging German submarines and he attempted the same with the Japanese by cutting off 85% of their oil supply unless they evacuated China and Indochina. There are few, if any, examples in modern history of greater and more statesmanlike benignity and dexterity in pursuit of a noble cause upon which the entire history of civilization depended than Roosevelt's

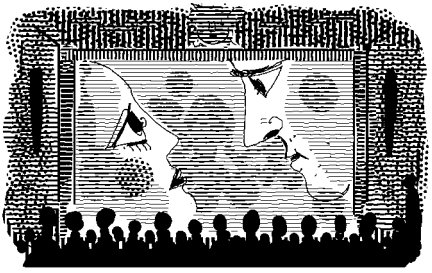
assistance to the democracies between the fall of France in June 1940 and the Japanese and Germans going to war with the United States in December 1941. With this one exception, I wrote a very favorable review of *History of the American People* and Paul very graciously returned me the favor with his review of my biography *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom* (2003), though he could not have agreed with its pro-Roosevelt thesis.

The many short biographies he wrote of prominent personalities in many fields were always witty and concise and informative though they followed his pattern of likes and dislikes: Churchill, Eisenhower, Mozart, and others were very good; Napoleon was horrid, a proto-Hitler, thoroughly evil—and all the fatalities of the Napoleonic Wars were to his account as surely as the liquidations in the Nazi death camps were to Hitler's.

Paul Johnson was in a category of his own as a historian, a magnificent phenomenon, a wonderful man, and a dear friend. He would be horrified in all his Christian humility at any suggestion that he was infallible, and given his sometimes bizarre opinions, such a problem is unlikely to arise. There will be a great many who feel, as I do, that it was a privilege to know him and that it is a very great sadness that we shall not be seeing him again.

Conrad Black is a former newspaper publisher, and the author of several books, including Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom *(PublicAffairs) and* Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full *(PublicAffairs).*

SHADOW PLAY
by Martha Bayles



The Tragedy of the Commons

Discussed in this essay:

Yellowstone, created by Taylor Sheridan and Jon Linson. Paramount Network.

Yellowstone is a TV series set in southwestern Montana in the present day, starring Kevin Costner as the widowed patriarch John Dutton, whose forebears founded the fictional Yellowstone Ranch in 1883. That ranch, said to be larger than Rhode Island, is threatened by the encroachments of real estate developers, multinational financiers, environmental activists, and the leaders of a fictional Indian reservation called Broken Rock. And the Dutton family cannot agree about how, or whether, to resist those encroachments.

Five years ago when *Yellowstone* first appeared on the Paramount

Network, it was dismissed by critics as a retread of the old-fashioned western, recycling old-fashioned values for a red-state niche market. Today, it is a top-rated show on both cable and streaming services. Prominent publications like *The Atlantic* are hailing it as "America's most popular TV show." And Taylor Sheridan, the horse trainer and indie filmmaker from Texas who created it, boasts of "shooting over $1 billion worth of television shows" for Paramount.

Among these are four *Yellowstone* prequels. Two are available now: *1883*, about the pioneer generation of the Duttons heading west on a wagon train; and *1923*, starring Helen Mirren and Harrison Ford as Dutton descendants battling cattle thieves, sheepherders, and dishonest politicians. Another prequel is in the works: *1883: The Bass Reeves Story*, starring David Oyelowo as the first black U.S. Marshal; as well as a second season of *1923*. There is also a spinoff: *6666*, set in "the Four Sixes," a real-life cattle ranch in west Texas that has been featured in *Yellowstone* and was recently sold to Sheridan for $192 million.

Lawlessness Is Not Freedom

Amid the flood of commentary on *Yellowstone*, there is surprisingly little speculation about its political orientation. But in the blue-state media there is general agreement that such a hugely popular series could not possibly be conservative. Reinforcing this view is Sheridan himself, who clearly wants the media to love his growing herd of cash cows. But the question is still worth asking: is *Yellowstone* conservative?

In one sense, yes. Unlike the slew of current films and TV series that look to America's future with dread, *Yellowstone* looks to its past with reverence. But does that reverence extend to traditional

American ideas such as freedom, democracy, equality, individualism, and the rule of law under a constitution? It would be nice to think so. But when Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington listed these ideas as the essential components of what he termed the "American Creed," he wasn't settling the matter so much as unsettling it, by observing that these ideas are not easily ordered, prioritized, or reconciled. Indeed, he argued forcefully that their meanings can shift as powerfully as the earth's tectonic plates, giving rise to "creedal passion" that can as often divide the nation as unite it.

For his part, Sheridan seems less interested in ideas than in expanding his entertainment universe to include new topics such as roughnecks on a Texas oil rig, a Mafia boss exiled in Tulsa, crime and corruption in a Michigan prison, anti-terrorist espionage in sunny Mallorca, and more. It is too soon to tell how successful these new ventures will be. Sheridan knows how to jack up his product with the usual stimulants of f-bombs, boobs, booze, bullets, and blood. But while these may be necessary to catch the attention of today's distracted audience, they are not sufficient to hold it. If these new ventures falter, it will be because they do not revive the same creedal passion—for the type of freedom that rides roughshod over law.

That freedom, or the myth of it, dates back to the 1880s, when the resistance of the Native tribes was finally crushed, the buffalo were all but exterminated, and the vast unfenced grazing lands between Mexico and Canada beckoned to fortune hunters large and small. The first to arrive were wealthy investors from the East Coast and Europe, who snapped up water rights and let loose as many cattle as they could afford. Then came cowboys, including *vaqueros* from the haciendas of northern Mexico and newly freed former slaves from west Texas, hoping to earn a decent wage for the

hard, dirty, but highly skilled work of managing wild longhorns.

This "Beef Bonanza," as one booster called it, began in the dusty southwestern plains but soon expanded to the mountain states. That is where *Yellowstone* is set, and it is hard to imagine a more photogenic spot for unfettered freedom than the Bitterroot Valley, where the real-life Chief Joseph Ranch with its grand log-and-boulder mansion serve as the location for the series. Accompanied by a soulful country music soundtrack, the recurring spectacle of John Dutton on horseback loping past the golden aspens with his free-spirited cowboys, whose bodily grace is matched only by their loyalty, makes *Yellowstone* a delight to the eye and ear, as well as an evocation of life on earth as good as it gets.

The Age-Old Issues

I do not wish to pop this bubble. But if this magnificent spectacle makes you think that unfettered freedom and infinite horizons still exist in the 21st-century West, then you should probably think again.

While working on this essay I talked with a real cattleman, T. Wright Dickinson, whose ranch in northwest Colorado resembles John Dutton's in being family-owned and operated since the 1880s, and enjoying access to a large enough patchwork of privately owned and publicly leased grazing land to support itself by raising cattle. Most western ranches today are too small to do that, so they combine raising livestock with hosting "guests" (formerly known as "dudes") eager to hunt, fish, hike, white-water raft, rock climb, play disc golf, shoot guns and arrows, throw tomahawks, sing around the campfire, even rope cattle (if they are up to it). Needless to say, the Dutton ranch does not need to do that, because it is already hosting millions of viewers.

When asked his opinion of *Yellowstone*, Mr. Dickinson made an interesting distinction between "the age-old issues" woven into western history and "the drama" afflicting the Dutton family. Of the two, he found the former more compelling.

I'm inclined to agree. For this New Englander, *Yellowstone* and its prequels offer a revelatory look at a key aspect of western history, which Mr. Dickinson described as "a century-long tragedy of the commons." His ancestors were encouraged to "go west where the land was free," he told me, only to find themselves in a wilderness where freedom meant "there were limited property rights, no accountability, no control over their destiny." The reason, he added, was that the power belonged to "eastern monied interests who didn't know up from down." And to the extent that this has remained true, the result is that "every mistake that's been made out here has been due to us not being allowed to do things our way."

A similar lawlessness existed in north central Wyoming in the 1880s, where violence broke out between the wealthy cattle barons and cowboys dreaming of starting their own ranches. The best-known story from that era is the Johnson County War, which began in 1887 when, after thousands of cattle died in a bitterly harsh winter followed by a drought, the Wyoming state legislature passed a law against "rustling," or rounding up the motherless, unbranded stray calves known as "mavericks" and branding them as one's own.

Until then, rustling had been common practice among aspiring cowboys and small homesteaders. But now all of a sudden it was a crime, and the cattle barons began hiring vigilantes to track down and lynch the offenders. The rustlers fought back, and after two years of sporadic violence the cattle barons organized a major assault, complete with hired vigilantes from Texas, which was met by a ragged militia of rustlers and local supporters. A pitched battle was about to ensue when the U.S. cavalry intervened. In the short

run, the cattlemen won. But in the long run, they lost their presumed ownership of the open range.

In 2002 the Hallmark Channel produced a well-crafted miniseries called *Johnson County War*, written by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, which gets most of the details right while also telling the tale from the perspective of the cowboys, small ranchers, and homesteaders. By contrast, the best-known version of this tale, Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian*, takes the other side—namely, the elitist perspective of the cattle barons. At the turn of the 20th century most of the cowboys in Wyoming were white, so this elitism was based less on race than on class and ethnicity. A Philadelphia-born Harvard man and friend of President Teddy Roosevelt, Wister was a committed Progressive who saw the Johnson County War as a case of well-bred, responsible businessmen ridding their land of ill-bred, grubby thieves.

The novel's unnamed hero is an ex-Confederate soldier from Virginia who works as a cowboy for a cattle baron who is also a retired judge. Taking note of the Virginian's work ethic and quiet integrity, the judge makes him his ranch boss, and then as the conflict escalates, his chief enforcer and vigilante. The Virginian undertakes this hard duty with a rigorous self-discipline that at one point requires him to hang a former boon companion who has fallen in with the rustlers. In keeping with Wister's social views, the nobility of this hero, who by the end has become part-owner of the ranch and won the heart of a beautiful Yankee schoolmarm, is attributed, not very subtly, to the natural superiority of his Anglo-Saxon blood.

In the early screen adaptations of *The Virginian*, this Social Darwinist theme was understandably suppressed in favor of the hero's evident virtues, giving rise to the figure of the taciturn, principled, courageous, ruggedly masculine cowboy-turned-lawman who is

still, despite everything, an icon of American culture. A recent example of this figure is Sheriff Walt Longmire, the titular character in the series of best-selling detective novels by Wyoming author Craig Johnson. Between 2012 and 2017 these novels were made into a TV series also called *Longmire*, which is available on Netflix and well worth a look, if only for the contrast with *Yellowstone*.

Doing What Needs to Be Done

Perhaps the most glaring contrast is in the depiction of the Indians. Taylor Sheridan makes a big deal of *Yellowstone*'s commitment to showing Native Americans as human beings living and breathing in the 21st century. But he should have taken a few cues from *Longmire*, which actually achieves that goal by giving its diversity of Indian characters a sense of humor and something to do besides making stiff little speeches about the oppression of their people by the white majority.

Another contrast is that *Yellowstone* portrays a larger number of non-Indian characters as heroes than *Longmire* does, but requires of them a smaller number of virtues. Really, all it takes to become one of John Dutton's knights or vassals is to vow your unquestioning loyalty while having the Yellowstone "Y" seared into your flesh with a branding iron. I doubt this is typical of American ranches. To judge by what I have seen of the 6666 Ranch in Texas, it is enough to wear the corporate logo on your shirt.

Blood oaths are more exciting, though—and better suited to Dutton's custom of ordering his most trusted knights to drive disobedient vassals and other riffraff across the Montana-Wyoming state line to the "train station," code for an isolated bend in the road where it is easy to kill a man and roll his body off a cliff. This fictional spot has a real-life counterpart in the "Zone of Death," a

50-square-mile sliver of Yellowstone National Park that, because it is under the legal jurisdiction of three different states (Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana), is effectively under none, making it impossible to prosecute any non-federal crime committed there, including murder.

The "train station" allows Dutton to practice a form of vigilantism that is not divulged to the women, presumably because they lack the strength to bear the burden of guilt it entails. Dutton's burden is the heaviest because he is the kingpin ordering the hits. That he is also the show's hero may seem baffling at first but makes more sense when you watch the prequels, which demonstrate clearly that, while the challenges facing the Dutton men have changed over time, their manner of facing them has not.

This is entertaining but troubling, because in the 1880s, when the rule of law was not yet established in the West, it was necessary to live by the code summed up for me by my brother-in-law, who grew up in hardscrabble Oklahoma: "There's what's mine, there's what's yours, there's the law, and there's what needs to be done." That code is still out there, or else my brother-in-law would not mention it. But for him, and I daresay most Americans with roots in the West, it is more a romantic myth than a viable way of life. My sister, niece, and nephew, two of whom are lawyers, would agree.

The Dutton family are living the myth, and to John Dutton, the law is no more than a weapon clumsily wielded by Jamie (Wes Bentley), his adopted son, whose standing in the family has been permanently diminished by three years at Harvard Law School. Unlike Rip Wheeler (Cole Hauser), John's most trusted knight, and Kayce (Luke Grimes), John's natural son, Jamie is no good at doing what has to be done. In five whole seasons he only manages to murder two people: a reporter for *The New York Times* and Garrett Randall (Will Patton), his natural father, recently released

from prison for murdering Jamie's mother. If Jamie were a true Dutton knight, he would have disposed of these bodies as deftly as Rip and Kayce. But he botches the job—and worse, gets photographed trying to roll Garrett, his second victim, off the "train station" cliff.

The Drama

That incriminating photo is taken by the most gifted member of the family, Beth (Kelly Reilly). The only daughter of Dutton and his deceased wife, Evelyn (Gretchen Mol), Beth has been in love with Rip since childhood, and he reciprocates in every way he can. But that does not make Beth happy. On the contrary, she is a walking trigger sprayer who takes pleasure in filling the air with whatever poisonous emotion she is feeling at the moment.

To explain—to justify?—this repugnant behavior, there are flashbacks showing Beth's troubled relationship with Evelyn, who on the occasion of Beth's first period tells her that the only way to survive being female is to become "the man most men will never be." Evelyn also uses her last breath to blame Beth for the riding accident that is about to end her life.

Then there's the flashback showing Beth as a young teenager begging Jamie to help her get an abortion. He takes her to the Indian Health Services free clinic, where a federal mandate is in place requiring all such surgeries to include sterilization. Jamie tries to hide this from Beth, but she finds out and becomes his worst enemy. That appalling mandate, aimed at reducing the Native American population, was rescinded in 1976, eight years before Beth is supposed to have been born. But the writers use it anyway, no doubt because in addition to sending another virtue signal about

racist oppression, it squeezes out another drop of sympathy for *Yellowstone*'s potty-mouthed anti-heroine.

Beth is reputed to be the most popular character in *Yellowstone*, and while that is not surprising, it is dismaying. To compare her to the foremothers depicted in the prequels is to bear witness to a calamity. Margaret Dutton (Faith Hill) in *1883* and Cara Dutton (Helen Mirren) in *1923* are as resourceful, brave, and honorable as the men—if not more so. Elsa Dutton (Isabel May) in *1883* is a spirited teenager who responds so profoundly to the wide-open spaces and their myth of unfettered freedom that she marries a Comanche warrior named Sam (Martin Sensmeir) who gives her an Indian name meaning Lightning With Yellow Hair.

I wonder what name Sam would give Beth. In season 5 of *Yellowstone*, the Duttons sit down to an all-beef dinner served by Gator (Gabriel Guilbeau), the family chef and only servant we ever see in their spotlessly maintained mansion. Immediately an argument breaks out between Beth and Summer (Piper Perabo), a preachy environmentalist and vegan who is having an affair with John Dutton, who for complicated reasons has taken her into his custody.

By the way, John Dutton is now the governor of Montana. This might have been the occasion for Taylor Sheridan to tip his hand and reveal whether the character played by Costner is dancing with Republicans or Democrats. But the series skips over the election to Dutton's first days in office, when he fires his entire staff because they keep talking about dull, boring issues that have nothing to do with preserving the Yellowstone legacy, which in case you missed the memo is all about family.

To return to the all-beef dinner: Rip, who believes in letting fights take their natural course, insists that Beth and Summer duke it out on the lawn. Beth batters Summer into submission, then prances drunkenly across the grass like a fighting cock with

blood on its spurs, while her father gazes at her in admiration and murmurs, "I wonder what it's like to be so free."

A Dysfunctional Credo

It is not enough, evidently, for John Dutton to be master of his domain, with a bunkhouse full of sworn enforcers who can lynch, poison, and shoot his enemies with the same impunity his ancestors enjoyed in the good old days. He wants a greater freedom, the kind that does not involve responsibility for anything or anyone, including himself. So, he admires Beth, and I guess we are supposed to do the same.

The trouble is, Beth is an adolescent cliché. Her credo is based on a YouTube version of Friedrich Nietzsche, whom she colorfully but incorrectly describes as "a German philosopher who died of syphilis after he cornholed some prostitute." Intoning that "Nie-tzsche's thoughts on right and wrong, good and evil" are that "there's no such thing," she informs Rip in an earlier scene that nothing matters except "loving with all your soul, and destroying anything that wants to destroy what you love." Rip nods in agreement, because this credo lightens his burden of guilt. And while Beth is the only character to quote Nietzsche, this credo is repeated, ad nauseum, throughout all five seasons of *Yellowstone*.

The trouble is, for this credo to make sense, Beth and the other Duttons would have to say a lot more about what exactly they love, and what exactly is trying to destroy it. Is one object of their love the Bitterroot Valley, whose pristine beauty forms such a glorious backdrop to this series? If so, then the Duttons might wish to consult Mr. Dickinson, the real-life rancher I interviewed, who described western history as a century-long tragedy of the commons.

Together with his fellow ranchers, Mr. Dickinson has managed, over the past several decades, to preserve a great deal of the "commons" that their ancestors claimed 130 years ago. This is no small achievement. But as he emphasized to me, this was never the achievement of a single family, much less a crew of free-wheeling vigilantes. It was hard, steady work, full of frustration and annoyance, that never ends because there is always a new threat to the land, and a new strategy needed to find the right balance of local interests—private and public, red state and blue state, ally and adversary—to keep the most rapacious outsiders at a truly strong arm's length.

My Native English Must I Now Forgo?

by Mark Helprin

The decline of our language may have been certified when the new term for teaching English in K-12 schools, "Language Arts," substituted vague complexity for simple precision, as it is in K-12 that English dies. For anyone of the old school, recent graduates have made reading even the leading newspapers exquisite torture.

When language is ungrammatical, asyntactical, or illogical, everything follows—the practice of medicine, flying of airplanes, building of bridges, writing of love letters, and *ars gratia artis*. Carelessness in expression infectiously hastens the general decay. Here are just a few choice examples from publications that should know better.

Whereas one advocates *for* a person, one advocates a policy—*of* which, not for which, one is an advocate. You do not arrive *to*, but

in or at a place. As Cleopatra might say, there is no such thing as an *ask*: it is a request. You don't *resolve* obstacles, you overcome them, just as you don't *solve* questions, but answer them. Although an issue can be a problem and a problem can be an issue, they are not synonymous, and when they are used as such it's a problem, not an issue. "This" is not an indefinite article. Missing an antecedent, you don't say, "I saw this dog," but "I saw a dog."

Unlike *The New York Times*'s bedeviling usage, now everywhere as people pretending to be journalists migrate from one asylum to another, "on" is not the universal preposition—as a study *of*, not on, this would show. One expresses concern *for* or *about*—not on—something and finds clues *to*, not on, it. Even my favorite newspaper, for which I wrote for decades, has decided that national adjectives are too much to bear. Hence, "Turkey restaurant" (you wouldn't know if you were getting cranberry sauce or shish kebab), the "Italy government," though not yet the "America Constitution."

Battlefield momentum is not *taken*; it is achieved or restored. China's population does not "take a drop," it drops, although falls or decreases would be better. Residents and fellows are not "unique from other healthcare workers," although they may be different. "Majority" requires a quantity of at least three. There is no such thing as the majority of Paris, rather than most of Paris. Assuming it isn't simultaneously specious and fallacious, and doesn't use a cigarette holder and sip martinis, no weapon is *sophisticated*; rather, it is complex, advanced, or highly capable. An *acute* problem is not necessarily intense, but of limited duration. "Like" is a comparative for nouns, "as," for verbs, as I just said.

But even such things as these pale against the genocide of conjunctions, suddenly the most widespread and rapidly growing abuse of English grammar. From a recent article: "A federal judge ordered on Thursday the suspect be remanded in custody," rather

than "that the suspect be remanded," or "the suspect to be remanded." Are our newspapers written by Borat? Even Borat might know that "lay" is the past tense of "lie," and transitive (as in "I will lay down the law"), and that "You should lay down" is incorrect.

Caption writers know neither how to write (supposedly their job) nor, apparently, what they see. Long ago, I read in *The New York Times* a caption identifying an American soldier, with his M16, atop a tank. Except that it was a British soldier, with an FN, atop an armored personnel carrier. Just the other day, a ship that anchored in (rather than, actually, *off*) a Russian city was in fact *two* ships, and they were tied up at a pier.

As for atrocities of style, real estate prose is perhaps the worst, but how about this ad from *The Wall Street Journal*:

> I am not a bracelet…. I sipped sake with the Empress of Japan. I flirted with fishermen on the Amalfi Coast. I sat front row for the Beatles. I danced with nobles along the Aegean Sea.

Oh yeah? Gimme a break. As in a binary munition, the deadly effects of this effusion were amplified by mixing pretension and alliteration, the two monsters of poesy.

Richard III said, "now is the winter of our discontent." These days, if you say, "Now heads of state speak—like—Valley Girls?" you will be told to shut up and surrender to the evolution of language. But there are objective criteria for distinguishing between simple ignorance and legitimate evolution.

First, rate. Like biological evolution, its linguistic equivalent only gradually accommodates new words, sound shifts, grammar, and historical upheavals. It took hundreds of years fully to integrate

Scandinavian, Saxon, and French into English. Unaccompanied by political coercion (of which we have a lot) or rapid and ubiquitous mass communication (same), in general, invasions, plagues, changes in climate, and new technologies exert slow pressure upon language. Though political coercion and mass communication favor the quick adoption of new words, they should not rapidly change grammar, syntax, and the meaning of old, non-political words.

That is, unless grammar and syntax don't come into play because they aren't taught; or because the meaning of old words or usages—"sophisticated," "lay" and "lie," etc.—were misunderstood in the first place or simply not known; or if a miscreant hasn't taken the trouble to know the origin and root of the word itself, or stopped to think of how he is using it; or if he has not read enough to have a store of guiding examples that honor a word as it has been artfully fixed by the long historical usage of countless others.

Add to absence or absurdity of instruction the attitude of privileged generations that, whether one is right or wrong, to be corrected is to suffer an assault upon one's existence. Everyone makes mistakes. Undoubtedly there are some above. In the richness and complexity of our language these are easy to come by (including almost failing to avoid a hanging preposition). But when accurately corrected, one should be only grateful so as better to levy the power of English and increase one's store of riches.

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